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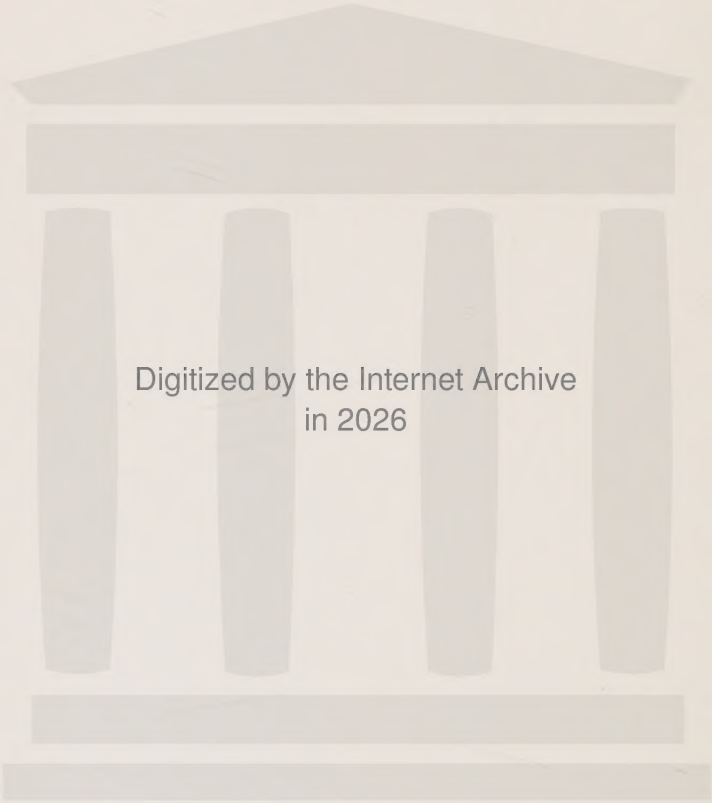
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The
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NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

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THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

BY

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To the Memory of

SAMUEL WALTER GREEN

EDITOR'S PREFACE

MOFFATT'S NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

THE aim of this commentary is to bring out the religious meaning and message of the New Testament writings. To do this, it is needful to explain what they originally meant for the communities to which they were addressed in the first century, and this involves literary and historical criticism; otherwise, our reading becomes unintelligent. But the New Testament was the literature of the early Church, written out of faith and for faith, and no study of it is intelligent unless this aim is kept in mind. It is literature written for a religious purpose. 'These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.' This is the real object of the New Testament, that Christians might believe it better, in the light of contemporary life with its intellectual and moral problems. So with any commentary upon it. Everything ought to be subordinated to the aim of elucidating the religious content, of showing how the faith was held in such and such a way by the first Christians, and of making clear what that faith was and is.

The idea of the commentary arose from a repeated demand to have my New Testament translation explained; which accounts for the fact that this translation has been adopted as a convenient basis for the commentary. But the contributors have been left free to take their own way. If they interpret the text differently, they have been at liberty to say so. Only, as a translation is in itself a partial commentary, it has often saved space to print the commentary and start from it.

As everyman has not Greek, the commentary has been written, as far as possible, for the Greekless. But it is based upon a first-hand study of the Greek original, and readers may rest assured that it represents a close reproduction of the original writers' meaning, or at any rate of what we consider that to have been. Our common aim has been to

enable everyman to-day to sit where these first Christians sat, to feel the impetus and inspiration of the Christian faith as it dawned upon the minds of the communities in the first century, and thereby to realize more vividly how new and lasting is the message which prompted these New Testament writings to take shape as they did. Sometimes people inside as well as outside the Church make mistakes about the New Testament. They think it means this or that, whereas its words frequently mean something very different from what traditional associations suggest. The saving thing is to let the New Testament speak for itself. This is our desire and plan in the present commentary, to place each writing or group of writings in its original setting, and allow their words to come home thus to the imagination and conscience of everyman to-day.

The general form of the commentary is to provide a running comment on the text, instead of one broken up into separate verses. But within these limits, each contributor has been left free. Thus, to comment on a gospel requires a method which is not precisely the same as that necessitated by commenting on an epistle. Still, the variety of treatment ought not to interfere with the uniformity of aim and form. Our principle has been that nothing mattered, so long as the reader could understand what he was reading in the text of the New Testament.

JAMES MOFFATT.

PREFACE

During the last fifty years the English-speaking world has not lacked commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews which have been marked by accurate scholarship and wide learning. It would have been a futile impertinence on my part to attempt to repeat or to improve on such a work as Dr. Moffatt's volume in the I.C.C. series, and I have, therefore, tried to avoid discussion of the many abstruse problems in criticism and exegesis which the subject presents. I have, however, done my best to note, compare, and appraise different views before forming my own opinions, and have, from time to time, mentioned instances in which I have been unable to reach a definite conclusion.

It is now nearly thirty years since I first made a serious study of this Epistle under the guidance of the late S. W. Green, of Regent's Park College, and ever since that time it has been one of the books which I have read with most pleasure and appreciation. Though there is much in it which is hardly in accord with the general trend of Christian thought, whether in or after New Testament times, I have never failed to derive from it help and inspiration. It is a book on which I have not found it easy to comment, for, in spite of its stately language, its thought is simple and usually obvious. The result is that, for the most part, I have been unable to do more than paraphrase its words.

Nevertheless, remembering that what appeals to one man as platitude may be paradox to another, I venture to send this volume out, in the hope that I may help to communicate to others something of what *Hebrews* has given to me. Finally, I must express my deep gratitude to the many friends who have helped me in the production of this book. I would mention especially Professor W. J. Gruffydd and Mr. Jenkin James of Cardiff, and, above all, my wife and the Rev. Professor C. H. Dodd of Manchester. Not only have these read the proofs, but they have made many valuable suggestions.

Theodore H. Robinson.

Cardiff,
February, 1933.

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INTRODUCTION

CHRISTIANITY sprang out of Judaism. In no other faith of the ancient world could men find the truth that God is one, or the complementary truth that this one God is righteous. Wherever else we look, east or west, north or south, we find a multiplicity of deities, of whom some may be good but others wicked. The Graeco-Roman world, the nearer East, Egypt, and the barbarian peoples, all worshipped many gods and goddesses, and there was not a vice or crime which could not be practised under the aegis of one or other of them. Among Jews alone could Jesus have presented God as the one, loving Father, who is at once the Creator of the universe, the Lord of history, and the source and standard of all morality. It was not an accident that Jesus was a Jew, and, in a certain sense, His work meant the liberation of the essential truths committed to His people, and their dissemination among all mankind. There is much in the Gospel which is not to be seen in the faith of the Jewish world, but it was there that the final revelation of God found the elements which were fundamental to its development.

In the nature of the case the Gentile Church soon overshadowed its Jewish section, and the latter disappeared comparatively early as a separate element with distinctive characteristics. The work and influence of St. Paul, and probably of others, resulted in the absorption of the Hebrew Church in the wider community, and, as its essential principles were accepted, it disappeared from the surface of Christian life and thought. Yet, before it vanished, it created and left for all later generations two documents which are of profound importance, and have secured recognition amongst the canonical Christian Scriptures. One of these was the Gospel according to St. Matthew, the other was the Epistle to the Hebrews.

While these two documents are both clearly of Jewish origin, and reflect the thought of the Jewish Church, they represent very different aspects of the circle from which they emanated. The Gospel of St. Matthew belongs essentially to Palestinian Judaism, and bears on every page the mark of the nobler elements in that Pharisaism which survived the destruction of the Temple, and lived on in Rabbinism. But, in the first century of our era, there were probably far more Jews outside Palestine than in the homeland. They had made their way into every quarter of the world and mingled with all peoples, both giving to them and receiving from them. In some cities, notably in Alexandria, they formed a very important and influential section of the community, and, though their relations with their heathen fellow-citizens were not always happy, they could not be ignored.

One inevitable result of these conditions was that the Jews of the Dispersion—the 'diaspora,' as they were called—found that their views and beliefs were profoundly modified by contact with Greek thought, then the dominant influence in philosophy and religion. Men like Philo of Alexandria sought to combine the truth which they found in Plato and his successors with the message of their own Law and Prophets. They found Plato in Moses, and imported into the language of Judaism the vocabulary and much of the thought of the Stoics and of others. They adopted the philosophic methods of exegesis, already applied to Homer, and allegorized and spiritualized anything in the Law which they found it difficult to accept literally. Their Bible was a Greek version of the Old Testament, commonly known as the Septuagint (LXX), from the story which said that seventy translators had been engaged on the task of turning it from Hebrew into Greek. The work of translation was spread over a long period, and, while it began in the middle of the third century B.C., it was hardly completed by the beginning of the Christian era. But in Philo's day the LXX Law was already well established, and was regarded as verbally inspired, in spite of many divergences from the text recognized as authoritative in Palestine. To judge from the

writings of this school, many of them were ignorant of Hebrew; even had they been able to read the Old Testament in the original, it would probably have made little difference to their method of exegesis.

It is to a Christian brought up in this school that we owe the Epistle to the Hebrews. In form the document is a letter, since it contains personal references[1] of a kind which would not occur in a sermon, still less in a theological treatise. It is clearly of Western origin, and is first quoted by Clement of Rome before the end of the first century A.D. But it was not popular in the section of the Church which gave it birth, and was first accepted as canonical in the East, whence it gradually made its way into the Western Canon. Its style, tone, and outlook are distinctive, and it forms a contribution to Christian literature which we could ill have spared.

In the circumstances it is somewhat strange that we know so little about the author and the first readers of the Epistle. The Eastern Church, in placing it among the canonical books, assigned it to St. Paul, and the West took over this theory with the book itself. Yet a very slight acquaintance with the writings of the early Church makes it clear that we can no more hold St. Paul to be the author of this document than we can ascribe *Sesame and Lilies* to Carlyle. Indeed, there is no author known to us in early Christianity whose style and thought at all resemble those of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Origen said, early in the third century A.D., 'As to who wrote this Epistle, God alone knows the truth,' and his dictum is still valid. Various names have been suggested in ancient and modern times—Barnabas, Apollos, and others—but its distinctiveness makes it impossible to accept as its author any writer from whom we have other works, and to use the name of an otherwise unknown person, however suitable on general grounds, is simply guess-work.

From the book itself, however, we can form some picture of the writer's mind. He was clearly learned in the Old Testament, especially in the Law and in the Psalms. He knew the Scriptures only in their Greek dress, for, while his quotations

[1] e.g. v. 11 f., vi. 9, xii. 4, xiii. 18, 23, 24.

sometimes show variations from the LXX as we have it, they never imply the slightest acquaintance with the Hebrew text. Indeed, the only point which suggests familiarity with the Hebrew language is the author's explanation of the name Salem,[1] and this may well have been a commonplace of contemporary exegesis. The Judaism he knew was rather that of the synagogue than of the Temple, for, not only are the books he quotes oftenest, those which would be most familiar through synagogue worship, but he once or twice makes slips in speaking of the Temple ritual and furniture. The language of the book is lofty and elevated, taking a high place among the literature of the age from its style and dignity. It stands alone, not only in the New Testament, but even among other products of the time as known to us.

All this suggests an Alexandrian Jew, and the impression is borne out by the type and quality of the author's thinking. We need not assume that he had read Plato or others of the well-known Greek philosophers ; he may have absorbed their teaching at second-hand. But he was certainly familiar with the writings of the Jewish-Alexandrian philosophers, and knew the Wisdom of Solomon and also, probably, Philo. His treatment of the Old Testament is certainly that of this school, and there is nothing in the Epistle which tends to throw doubt on its Alexandrian provenance. This does not mean that it was necessarily written in Alexandria or to an Alexandrian group, for every type of thought spread widely over the world. But there can be little doubt that the author was brought up in the school of Egyptian Judaism, and that is the important fact for his readers.

We know just as little of the people to whom the Epistle was first addressed as we do of its author. No name stands at its head, yet it was clearly intended for a group of Christians. The only place mentioned is Italy,[2] but this tells us where the work was composed, not where it was sent, and once more we have to fall back on indications supplied by the document itself.

It is clear, from references already noted, that the Epistle

[1] vii. 2. [2] xiii. 24.

is addressed to a community—quite possibly a small group—and different scholars have located its recipients at Jerusalem, Antioch, Caesarea, Alexandria, Ephesus, Beroea, and other places—a divergence of opinion which suffices to illustrate the uncertainty of the matter. It does not even follow that tradition is right in making the recipients Jews, for, though much of the argument is based on the validity of the Old Testament, this position was early assumed in the Gentile Church, as our oldest 'Apologies' show. The first generation of Christians was already passing away, and the writer could appeal to the example of earlier leaders and teachers.[1] The only personal name mentioned is that of Timothy,[2] and there is no reason to doubt that he is to be identified with St. Paul's convert and companion, since the Epistle cannot be assigned to a date later than the end of the first century A.D. There had been persecution in the Church, but the storm had died down, and the Christians had to face only unpopularity and contempt, though there was still the possibility that the active violence of the government and of the mob would be revived.

The spiritual condition of the Church is significant. It had manfully endured spoliation and persecution in its early days,[3] but since then had not made the progress which the writer felt himself justified in expecting. It had 'left its first love,' and was beginning to waver in its allegiance. While it is usual among scholars to connect the Epistle with Rome, either as the place of origin or the destination, it cannot be denied that the general situation resembles that reflected by some of the 'letters to the Seven Churches' in Revelation—perhaps especially by that directed to Ephesus—and the reference to Timothy, already mentioned, may point to an Ephesian or to some other Asiatic destination. But this, like most of the other external facts concerning the Epistle, must remain a matter of conjecture.

In order to reawaken the faith and love of his correspondents, the writer seeks to present to them Jesus. He is seen in relation to the universe and to God, and in contrast both to

[1] xiii. 7, 17. [2] xiii. 23. [3] x. 32 ff.

the angels and to those men who have been commonly regarded as the chief recipients of divine revelation and the most effective mediators between God and man. Special stress is laid on the priesthood, since that was traditionally the order which most completely fulfilled the function of bringing God and man together. This leads to a consideration of sacrifice, and of the position of Jesus in relation to that institution. On this basis the writer exhorts his readers to a faith which can take the place of knowledge and can realize the ideal.

The whole forms a close piece of reasoning which, given the premisses, is valid for its time. Assuming the correctness of the Alexandrian methods of exposition, the writer offers convincing proofs of his thesis that Jesus is at once the ' ideal ' High Priest and the supreme sacrifice. But men seldom give of their best in argument, nor does a debate often reveal the deepest truths of which the disputants are conscious. We need not here dwell on other aspects of his teaching, but we must observe that, underlying the dialectic, whose aim is to exhibit a doctrine of atonement by sacrifice, based on the old Law, there is a deep-seated conviction that the plan of salvation can best be described as atonement through sympathy. Sharing in the divine nature and moral perfection, Jesus has also a complete understanding of the human position, for He has passed through it Himself, and knows from experience its difficulties and temptations. Indeed, He knows more of temptation than any other, for He alone has felt and resisted its full power. Others fall with more or less ease, but against His immovable purity and sinlessness the forces of evil have dashed themselves in vain. This thought has no direct bearing on the writer's argument, and adds little or nothing to its logical force. But so deeply rooted is it in his spirit that it emerges inevitably from time to time. It cannot be repressed or excluded, and not a few of the most lovingly treasured phrases in the Epistle give it utterance.

Finally, we may note briefly that the didactic and homiletic purpose of the Epistle is never allowed to lie hidden for very long. Again and again the writer interrupts the thread of his reasoning to emphasize the practical application of what he has

said, to rebuke his readers for a weakness, or to call them to higher spiritual levels. Such a digression is, for instance, to be seen in ch. xi., a passage which is rightly held to be among the greatest utterances in the world's religious literature. But it does not stand alone, and there are not a few readers who will feel that, after all, the logic and the dialectic are the least important elements in the book. Its value lies rather in its passion for Christ, in its presentation of Him, not, perhaps, as 'Jesus of Nazareth,' but certainly as the perfect 'Author of Salvation,' and in its appeal for devoted service to Him.

It is difficult to analyse such a document as this, where the writer's mind proceeds from one part of his theme almost insensibly into the next, and where the main outline of argument is interrupted by frequent digressions. But it is possible to follow out a general line of thought, making due allowance for the author's peculiarities. He begins by giving Jesus His right place in revelation, in creation, and in the world order, concluding with an appeal to his readers to attend above all to this supreme Person (i. 1–ii. 4). Especially does Jesus stand above the angels, in virtue of His humiliation and of His exaltation (ii. 5–18). Passing then to human history, he contrasts Jesus with the two earliest heroes of Israel, Moses and Joshua, of whom the former was the faithful servant, while the latter gave Israel her rest in the promised land. This section concludes with an exhortation not to lose the opportunity offered by Jesus (iii. 1–iv. 13). The mention of a High Priest prepares the way for the next point to be raised (iv. 14–16). Some general remarks on this head introduce a reference to Melchizedek (v. 1–10). Here the author feels that what he has to say may be somewhat beyond the capacity of his readers, since they are still at a comparatively elementary stage of development, and he inserts a rather long exhortation to progress in the Christian life (v. 11–vi. 20), coming back to Melchizedek at the end of it. Ch. vii. is devoted to a comparison between Jesus and the Aaronic priests, in which use is made of the position of Melchizedek, and the thought of the

Epistle moves on to what may be regarded as the main function of the priests, their place in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Here special stress is laid on two elements in the subject, the Covenant sacrifice and that of the Day of Atonement, the argument culminating in a comparison between the imperfect sacrifices offered under the Law, and the perfect offering of Christ (viii. ix.). In x. 1–18 this last thought is more specifically developed, and there follows a practical exhortation based on what has gone before (x. 19–31). Here the main argument of the book ends, but there is much more to be said in reinforcement of the appeals that have been made for fuller consecration and for continued progress. First there is a reference to the record of the group to whom the Epistle is actually addressed (x. 32–39), and this is followed by the great list of the heroes of faith (xi. 1–xii. 2). After a short discussion of the place of suffering in spiritual training (xii. 3–13), the writer proceeds to offer sundry exhortations, practical and spiritual (xii. 14–xiii. 17), and brings his work to a close with personal greetings, information and requests (xiii. 18–25).

COMMENTARY

I. i. 1–ii. 4: Jesus, the Son of God

i.

Many were the forms and fashions in which God spoke of old 1
to our fathers by the prophets, but in these days at the end 2
He has spoken to us by a Son—a Son whom He appointed
heir of the universe, as it was by Him that He created the
world. He, reflecting God's bright glory and stamped with 3
God's own character, sustains the universe with His word
of power; when He had secured our purification from sins,
He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;
and thus He is superior to the angels, as He has inherited a 4
Name superior to theirs.

Jesus is the theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the author begins his work, not with the salutations and introduction common to ancient letters, but with this solemn exordium. Seldom has so much been compressed into so few words. Here we have set before us the place of Jesus in divine revelation, His relation to God, His relation to the universe, and His superiority to the angels.

Jesus was not an absolutely isolated phenomenon. The way had been prepared for Him, and He stood at the end of a long line of those through whom God revealed Himself to Israel. There is a continuity in revelation, a single purpose running through the whole, and, though we may well feel that Christianity is a different thing from Judaism, even from the Judaism of the Prophets, there is yet an indissoluble link between the old Covenant and the new. For behind both there lies the same God, giving, age by age, to mankind as much knowledge of Himself as weak human nature can bear. He has never left Himself without witness, and to Israel, the people whom He chose for the supreme

manifestation of Himself, He made known His nature and His will directly **by the Prophets.**

Here we meet at once with a theory of prophetic inspiration. God did not speak merely *through* the Prophets, but *in* them. That is to say, the writer seems to adopt the Alexandrian theory, so well known to us from Philo, that God took possession of these men, and that He used them as mechanical mouthpieces, through whom He Himself spoke the word He had to deliver. Yet, though it was divine, the message was imperfect, for the fullest revelation could come only through one who was not merely temporarily possessed by the Spirit of God, but was in a deeper sense permanently, eternally, one with Him. Now the era of the older method was drawing to a close. Like so many others in the early Church, the writer of this Epistle believed that the world was near its end. Exactly how the great consummation would come they did not know, save that they held that Jesus Himself would shortly return in the clouds of heaven. But, with a pessimism comparable only to their ultimate optimism, these men felt that they were living **in these days at the end.** The final cataclysm could not long be delayed, and it was the more urgent that believers should have their faith strengthened, and that the Gospel should be widely preached.

The new agent of revelation was a **Son . . . reflecting God's bright glory and stamped with God's own character.** In these three phrases we have three aspects of the relation between Jesus and God. The two are not formally identified, but the connexion between them is so close as to be tantamount to identity in practice. A son is at least of the same species as his father, and may resemble him very closely indeed. So, while the christological doctrine of the Church is not expressly stated, the language employed is such as will ultimately lead to it. That intense and passionate monotheism, which Christianity inherited from Judaism, could never have tolerated the conception of a Son of God who, though of the divine species, was yet an entirely independent entity from the Parent. Such a belief would inevitably have opened wide the door to a polytheism, and no Christian could speak of

Jesus as the Son of God in the sense in which the pagan world could speak of Heracles as being the son of Zeus. Some other explanation and definition of the terms must be found. In the meantime it is enough to note that the writer clearly means his readers to understand that, in a very real sense, the nature of God, and not merely His message, was manifested in Jesus.

In the other two phrases we have a hint as to the lines along which conception of the Son of God may further develop. The writer shows himself to be conversant with the metaphysical theories current in his day, especially in the Alexandrian school of Jewish philosophy. The Book of Wisdom[1] speaks of Wisdom in terms so similar to those used here that independence is practically impossible. Our writer cannot have been ignorant of the other passage—'*reflecting* the invisible light.' Now Wisdom is identified in the Alexandrian philosophy with the 'Word'—the 'Logos' of the Fourth Gospel—which also owes something to this same circle of ideas. God is Himself invisible, intangible, unknowable, belonging to the pure spiritual realm of 'ideas,' save in so far as He chooses to project Himself into the phenomenal. He is 'light,' 'bright glory,' yet may not be seen with the physical eye, for He stands outside the material world, and dwells on a wholly different plane. But from Him there comes, as the rays come from the sun, an 'effulgence,' an issuing brightness, which enters into and penetrates the physical and material world, and so reveals Himself. It is something of His own essence, so transformed as to be perceptible by the ordinary human eye, and, since it partakes of His nature and has its origin in Him, it may fairly be spoken of as His 'Son.' Jesus is not a mere messenger; He is, as it were, God translated into terms of human life, maintaining His oneness with His source, yet reaching far out into the lower concrete world, a realization of the ideal.

The third phrase may help us still further to grasp the writer's thought, though it does not convey, as does the second, the conception of an unbroken union between the

[1] vii. 26.

Father and the Son. Jesus is '**stamped with God's own character.**' Ancient seals were carved with the device appropriate to their owners, often with little more than a name. When the seal was impressed on the soft wax or clay, it left behind the inscription it bore. The seal is the essence of God —God Himself. When this is impressed on the material, physical world, it leaves an exact image of the original. The seal itself is withdrawn, but the impression remains, and exhibits the nature and essence of the original. Jesus is, so to speak, God thrown on the screen of human life.

We must not, however, allow ourselves to deduce from the last metaphor the conclusion that there is or can be any permanent gulf between the Father and the Son. The separation —in so far as it was a separation—was only temporary, and had a special purpose in view ; the purpose achieved, the two are reunited—**when He had secured our purification from sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.** Here we have at once a hint of what the Epistle will develop in much greater fulness. The language is ceremonial and Levitical, and at once suggests a comparison between the atoning work of Jesus and the atonement from sin which could, under the old dispensation, be secured only by priestly mediation. As the author later insists at some length, the work of Jesus was finished and complete through a single act in time. When this was over, He was free to return, and did return to His former proximity and intimacy with the Father. As from the first, the two are One. In so far as they are distinct, the Son has His position attested by the unique honour which He holds—that of sitting on the **right-hand** side of the throne. We thus have a picture from which it is difficult to say what the christology of the writer was ; probably he had not worked it out in exact terms for himself. But we can see that he ascribed to Jesus a unique position in the world-order, and that, even if he could not identify Him with God, he found it equally impossible to separate the Son from the Father.

We observe next the revelation of this **Son** to the universe, **i.e.** to the physical world. God has **appointed** Him **heir of the universe.** We must not take the term too literally. There

is a Hebrew root which is always rendered both in Greek and in English by 'inherit' or some kindred expression, which, nevertheless, has a somewhat different *nuance* from that of the words used in translation. While it is commonly applied to the acquisition of property after the death of an owner, the stress is laid, not on the fact that the previous holder is dead, but on the possession by the new master. It may mean no more than 'to enter into possession of,' and that is the sense which we must read into it here. Jesus, belonging as He did to one of the smaller nations of the world, followed by only a small section of that nation, forsaken even by them, crucified by the authorities of His time—Jesus was yet the Master, Lord, and Owner, not merely of Palestine, nor even of the earth, but of the whole universe of which the earth itself forms but a small part. No doubt the cosmology of the writer's age presented him with a much smaller universe than that which scientists contemplate to-day. But we may be sure that he would have used the same terms had he conceived the notion of a galactic universe forming a single atom in an illimitable world of space and matter. With every advance in knowledge he would have made an advance in his theology; as the confines of the universe receded into boundless space, so would Jesus have grown to him.

This cosmic supremacy, mastery, and ownership, are based on one fundamental fact—it was **by** Jesus **that** God **created the world.** There are two problems which a religious philosophy must always try to solve. These are the relation between God and man, and the relation between God and the universe. How does God communicate with His human creatures? How did God make the world, and how does He sustain it? The one is the problem of Communion, the other the problem of Creation. The Jewish-Alexandrian philosophy, with its double Hebrew and Greek heritage, posited an element in the divine nature, a Wisdom-Logos, which might be regarded as the active and effective principle in the Godhead. It (or He—even Philo is not clear as to the personality of the Logos) is God coming into that world of matter to which the physical universe belongs and in which humanity shares,

and the same answer can thus be given to both questions. As the Book of Wisdom puts it, Wisdom 'is the artificer of all things,'[1] and 'entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God, and prophets.'[2] Our author would have agreed with the writer of the Fourth Gospel when he said, 'The Logos became flesh and dwelt among us,' for he, too, was ready to accept in general the findings of philosophy, and to apply them in particular to Jesus. The early thinkers in the Church said in effect, 'Philosophy has rightly assumed that there must be some divine faculty, some element within that complex personality we call God, which acts on and in the physical world. But we can go further than the vague conjectures of the metaphysician, and can affirm that this Power has been manifested in history, and we have known Him as Jesus. In Him, and in Him alone, can the quest of the human mind and spirit find its goal; He is the solution, both of the problem of Creation, and of the problem of Communion.'

So is Jesus given His rightful place in relation to God, to man, and to the universe. The writer can now proceed to contrast Him with other means of communication between the divine and the human, and so, in verse 4, he introduces the **angels**, and simply states the supremacy of Jesus over them. The general subject deserves a passing reference.

When, in the sixth century B.C., Israel came into contact with a wider world than that which she had hitherto known, she had already developed a theology which made her God, Yahweh, the Lord of the whole universe. But that universe had grown suddenly, and, as a natural corollary, God had receded. Jewish thinkers, therefore, were ready to accept a doctrine of intermediate beings, standing between God and man in the cosmic order, such as that offered by Persian religion. These 'angels' were subordinate to God, and acted as His servants; their duties including the carrying of divine messages to men. They were well recognized personalities, and even in our New Testament we can see how the early Church simply accepted the doctrine. Jesus, too, was in

[1] vii. 22. [2] vii. 27.

some sense a divine messenger, and a place had to be found for Him in the celestial hierarchy. That place is given here—He stands above the angels, for, through Scripture, God has assigned to Him a position far superior to that of any angel. Jesus **has inherited** (as we have seen, we must understand this to mean ' has entered into the possession of ') **a Name superior to theirs.** God has said things about Jesus which He has not said, and would not have said, about **angels,** thus giving Him the supreme **Name** and reputation. It is possible that those to whom the Epistle was first addressed were in danger of giving too large a place and too high a divinity to angels, and thinking too little of Jesus. The existence of this danger in the Church is attested by St. Paul's warning in Col. ii. 18. The time might come when angels would recede altogether into the background, and the Christian spirit be satisfied with Christ alone. But neither St. Paul nor the writer can go so far ; each is prepared to accept the doctrine of angels, to acknowledge their existence, and to recognize in them a regular means whereby God may communicate with man. Yet they must not be given too high a position, and, in particular, their inferiority to Jesus must be recognized as an essential element in the Christian faith.

For to what angel did God ever say, 5
'Thou art My son,
to-day have I become Thy father' ?
Or again,
' I will be a father to Him,
and He shall be a son to Me' ?
And further, when introducing the Firstborn into the world, 6
He says,
'Let all God's angels worship Him.'
While He says of angels, 7
' Who makes His angels into winds,
His servants into flames of fire,'
He says of the Son, 8
'God is Thy throne for ever and ever,
Thy royal sceptre is the sceptre of equity :

9 *Thou hast loved justice and hated lawlessness,**
therefore God, Thy God, has consecrated Thee
with the oil of rejoicing beyond Thy comrades'—
10 **and,**
'Thou didst found the earth at the beginning, O Lord,
and the heavens are the work of Thy hands;
11 *they will perish, but Thou remainest,*
they will all be worn out like a garment,
12 *Thou wilt roll them up like a mantle and† they will be changed,*
but Thou art the same,
and Thy years will never fail.'
13 **To what angel did He ever say,**
'Sit at My right hand,
till I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?
14 **Are not all angels merely spirits in the divine service, commissioned for the benefit of those who are to inherit salvation?**

* Reading ἀνομίαν instead of ἀδικίαν.
† Omitting [ὡς ἱμάτιον], which has been repeated from the previous line.

The writer has briefly and dogmatically stated certain preliminary doctrines in the brief introduction of four verses, and now he is free to begin his system of argument, proving his case, as he intends to do throughout, by reference to the Old Testament. We shall find much to interest us in his method of using Scripture, and, even though we may not feel inclined to adopt his principles of exegesis, yet we shall have to admit that, given the standpoint of his generation, his arguments have a certain cogency.

The passages here quoted are mostly taken from the Psalter; we find references to Ps. ii. 7, 2 Sam. vii. 14, Deut. xxxii. 43, Pss. civ. 4, xlv. 6f., cii. 25–27, cx. 1. In all cases the citation is made direct from the LXX, and the wording is usually exact, though in some instances the text followed is not the best attested. The reference to Deuteronomy is particularly interesting, since, while the verse is found in the LXX, it does not appear in the traditional Hebrew text, and

was clearly a later insertion in the Greek. Here, it may be remarked, the standard LXX text has ' sons of God ' instead of **all God's angels.** Our author's wording is found in one MS. which cannot be later than the fifth century, and may have been influenced by this Epistle. In any case, the interpretation is correct, for the term ' sons of God,' as in Ps. xxix. 1, Job i. 6, ii. 1, refers to the intermediate powers who stand about the throne and do God's bidding.

The high position held by the angels is not disputed. The citation from Ps. civ.—'*Who makes His angels into winds, His servants into flames of fire*'—is intended to emphasize the doctrine that they stand immeasurably above humanity. They are of finer and more ethereal substance than the gross clay of human bodies, untrammelled by the limitations which beset mankind, for they are as swift and invisible as the wind, as intangible and effective as the fire. Yet Jesus stands higher still. We notice that the writer of the Epistle assumes that references to ' the Lord,' and passages generally admitted to be Messianic, may all legitimately be applied to Jesus. This, no doubt, would have been a dialectic weakness if the argument had aimed simply at convincing Jews, but the whole is addressed to readers who have already accepted Jesus as Lord and Christ. To them Jesus was the Lord, and they quite naturally appropriated to Him any suitable passage in which the word occurred.

For the angels, at their highest, are **merely spirits in the divine service**; Jesus is the Son. The proof of this position is found in the quotation from Ps. ii. 7, where all would have agreed (in apostolic days) that the Messiah was intended. God has definitely stated that He holds the Christ to be His Son, and, since Jesus is the Christ, it follows that He is also the Son. The reference to 2 Sam. vii. 14—'*I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me*'—was probably as convincing to the mind of the writer, though the evidence is less direct. The words were addressed to David,' and there is a subtle hint that David himself can represent the Christ, since the latter is to be his descendant. Similar reasoning is to be found later in the Epistle, where Abraham is made to include

his descendant Levi.[1] The superiority of Jesus is still further attested by the citation from the Greek text of Deut. xxxii. 43, though here it is not clear that the words were ever taken by other writers in a Messianic sense. Even this does not tell the whole story of the exaltation of the Son, and the author has recourse to a passage whose meaning, alike in the original[2] and in the quotation here, is very far from being certain. Does it mean '**God is Thy throne for ever and ever,**' or does the writer implicitly identify Jesus with God, and say, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever'? The remainder of the citation suggests that the former is what the writer had in mind, but we cannot be certain. In either case, however, it is clear that he means his readers to feel that Jesus is being addressed in the following verse, and that, once more, His uniqueness is attested by Scripture. He stands in a relation to God which has no parallel, whether we are to understand that this exalted position was native to Him or whether He was raised to it because of His character. There are occasional hints elsewhere which suggest that the author played with the latter view, but it does not follow that he consciously adopted it as one of his basic doctrines.

Another reference to the Psalter[3] appeals to a doctrine which has already been stated in verse 2. **It was by Him that** God **created the world.** That has been established; it is now used as a basis for argument. Jesus, as the Creator, is seen to be superior to that universe which came into being through His agency, especially because the material world is evanescent—even *the heavens . . . will perish.* Not so Jesus; He is eternal and immutable. Further, in view of the context, we must assume a contrast with the angelic powers. They, certainly, were not the creators, and here Jesus is emphatically above them. It is, moreover, not impossible that the writer had in view a theory according to which the forces of nature were controlled by angels, who would perish when the physical world came to an end.

Finally, in this connexion, we have a quotation from a well-known Messianic Psalm,[4] where the pre-eminence of the Christ

[1] vii. 9 f. [2] Ps. xlv. 6, 7. [3] Ps. cii. 25–27. [4] Ps. cx. 1.

is especially marked. In the first place He sits at the right hand of God—the place of honour in the royal court. This is a position which has never been offered to any of the angels; they must stand in attitudes of service. But Jesus has had allotted to Him a place which almost puts Him on a level with God, and proves that He is the person most honoured in all the universe. This is not all. The divine throne is not His permanent home, for the time is coming when He will enter into His own kingdom. Now there are adversaries who challenge His authority and oppose His will, but these are all to be subdued and reduced to complete subservience, becoming *a footstool for* His *feet*. No contrast could be more forcible. The angels are servants, who do the will of God; here it is God who ministers. The writer was sufficiently imbued with Oriental feeling to see real greatness in being served rather than in offering service. The supreme person is He for whom the rest labour and struggle, and when God Himself bids the Christ sit still and watch the divine power working to found an empire for Him, we know that Jesus has attained a position which is indeed unique. By way of contrast, the writer adds some words of his own, sketching the functions of the angels. He does not need to quote Scripture here, for his position will be accepted by every reader without question. Angels are, in the nature of the case, spirits in the divine service, subordinates whose duty it is to carry the messages of God, or, perhaps, His worshippers. God does not minister to them; they minister to Him. Especially is it a part of their work to communicate God's will to such as He has appointed to inherit salvation. The particular reference becomes clear from the next paragraph.

ii.

We must therefore pay closer attention to what we have heard, 1
in case we drift away. For if the divine word spoken by 2
angels held good, if transgression and disobedience met
with due punishment in every case, how shall we escape 3
the penalty of neglecting a salvation which was originally
proclaimed by the Lord Himself and guaranteed to us by
those who heard Him, while God corroborated their 4
testimony with signs and wonders and a variety of

miraculous powers, distributing the holy Spirit as it pleased Him.

Here we meet for the first time with a homiletic digression. These verses form no part of the writer's argument, but he cannot refrain from pointing the moral of the conclusion he has just reached, and insisting on its practical application to the life and faith of his readers. It seems as though he were anxious about his friends, and feared that they were not making full use of the privileges which were available for them. They have not the keenness which marked the first generation, and may fail to appreciate alike their opportunities and their dangers. So from time to time the logical thread is broken off, and, as in this passage, an attempt is made to bring home the full force of the truth which has been demonstrated.

We note that in the last sentence of the preceding paragraph one of the functions of the **angels** (perhaps their most important function) has been defined. They are **commissioned for the benefit of those who are to inherit salvation.** This term has always in this book an eschatological flavour, and we must understand that behind the words lies the thought of the judgement day. When men appear finally before the great throne, they will have to prove their righteousness—that which wins them **salvation**—by showing how they have conformed to the **divine word.** Many will not have received the word at all, and, though there is no explicit statement as to their fate, we are left to assume that their condition is hopeless. They can have no claim on **salvation.** There may be a loophole for them, on the ground of ignorance, but this plea cannot be advanced by any who have had presented to them an authoritative statement of the will of God.

As a matter of fact, our author would say, two such statements have been made in the course of history, and they are here contrasted with one another. The first came to men in the Law, as delivered through **angels.** The Jewish theology of the early Christian centuries, especially outside Palestine, thought of the Law as having been committed to Moses through angelic agency. Another illustration of the doctrine

may be seen in Gal. iii. 19, and it is interesting to observe how much more St. Paul made of the contrast between the two modes of revelation than did the writer of this Epistle. Here it is used simply to emphasize and to reinforce the urgency of the claim Jesus has upon the obedience of His followers. For the Law in itself **held good.** It was a valid means whereby the purpose and desire of God was manifested, and every provision in it was stringently enforced, for **transgression and disobedience met with due punishment in every case.**

The comparison which has already been made between Jesus and the angels enables the writer to emphasize the importance of the Gospel. The old Law was sufficiently authoritative, though it was mediated only by angels. *A fortiori*, the new Law is immeasurably more authoritative, since Jesus is immeasurably above the angels. If there were no escape from punishment under the old Covenant, what hope can there be for those who **drift away** from the new? Both are of divine origin, and both belong to the same realm. The word 'Law' is deliberately avoided, since it might apply only to the former dispensation, and the term '**divine word**' is employed, which will cover both equally.

The second manifestation of the **divine word** has a triple attestation. In the first instance, it **was originally proclaimed by the Lord Himself,** and therefore had behind it all the force of His character and position. (We may note, in passing, a stylistic feature which must have struck every reader of this Epistle—the fondness of the writer for compound phrases. '**Originally proclaimed**' is, literally, 'received a beginning,' and this is by no means the only instance in which the writer uses an expression of this kind in preference to a simple verb.) In the second place, the message was **guaranteed to** the writer and his readers **by those who heard.** This is not the language of the first generation of Christians, and could hardly have come from a member of the Apostolic circle. It stands in strong contrast to the attitude of St. Paul, who, though not one of the original Twelve, yet always claimed that his authority was as direct and as valid as theirs. He would

never have suggested that he relied on the reports brought to him by his predecessors in the Apostleship, still less would he have used their testimony as an argument for the validity of his message.

In the third place, **God corroborated their testimony with signs and wonders and a variety of miraculous powers.** It is not clear what the exact import of this sentence is. It may mean, on the one hand, that the Apostles themselves were able to work miracles, or it may imply the continuance of these gifts in the Church of the second generation. The form of the sentence suggests the first of the two views, but the latter is not impossible, especially when we read immediately afterwards that God was **distributing the holy Spirit as it pleased Him,** with the stress on the ' Him.' To the first Christian generation the characteristic gift of the Spirit was the power of ecstatic speech, mysterious and unintelligible except to such as might be especially endowed with gifts of interpretation.[1] But it was not long before the Church realized (we think inevitably of such passages as 1 Cor. xii. and xiv.) that God had many ' gifts ' to apportion amongst the members of the Church, and that, in the last resort, these must all be attributed to the same source, i.e. to the **holy Spirit.** Ecstatic utterance was extraordinary and miraculous, but it had little value except to those who used it, and it was in other ways that the power of God was most clearly manifested to the edification of the Christian community. St. Paul himself had seen this, and we can almost read such a passage as 1 Cor. xii. 4–11 as a commentary on this phrase. There is no direct verbal connexion between the two, it is true, but it is hard to believe that our writer was ignorant of the work of his great predecessor.

The main purpose of this digression was doubtless hortatory. But it has also served to bring out and to emphasize an aspect of Jesus of which a hint has already been given in i. 3, and which is to be the main theme of the writer. Jesus has been given His rightful place in the cosmos, and has been shown to be superior to the world, to men, and to angels, and now

[1] Cp. 1 Cor. xiv. 27.

the stress is to be laid on His supreme function—the salvation of mankind. That is God's greatest task. That is the highest achievement at which even Omnipotence can aim, and it is one which, fitly enough, can be accomplished only by the supreme manifestation of God in the world. The work of Christ was done only when He had secured our purification from sins,[1] and the greater part of the book is devoted to a discussion of the means whereby this was achieved. Jesus takes a place of authority and supremacy denied even to the angels, because He performed a task impossible to them in the redemption of the world. There had been men in the past who had taken their share in this work, or who had attained to a temporary or incomplete solution of the most elusive problem in the universe. But Jesus was greater than these, greater than Moses, greater than Joshua, greater than any priest, for the best that any of these could do was to give a faint adumbration of the complete and perfect work which was carried to fulfilment only by the Son of God.

II. ii. 5–18: Jesus, His Humiliation and Exaltation

For the world to come, of which I am speaking, was not put 5
under the control of angels. One writer, as we know, has 6
affirmed,

What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?
or the son of man, that Thou carest for him?
For a little while Thou hast put him lower than the angels, 7
crowning him with glory and honour,
*putting all things under his feet.** 8

Now by *putting all things under* him, the writer meant to leave nothing out of his control. But, as it is, we do not yet see *all things controlled* by man; what we do see is Jesus 9
***who was put lower than the angels for a little while* to suffer death, and who has been *crowned with glory and honour* that by God's grace He might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was befitting that He** 10

[1] i. 3. * Omitting *καὶ κατέστησας αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου.*

for whom and by whom the universe exists, should perfect the Pioneer of their salvation by suffering.

The **angels** now appear for the last time in the process of the argument ; they are introduced only in order to be dismissed. For the writer has envisaged, in apocalyptic fashion, a marvellous future, when all humanity, now stained and foul with sin of every kind, shall be redeemed and purified. There will come a day when the world will be inhabited by a race of which every member belongs to the ransomed sons of God, when evil will be dead, and when mankind shall be perfected. The ruler, master, and Lord of that age will be Jesus. To no angel could such a position ever be ascribed, and here, once and for all, their inferiority to the Christ is manifested.

In accordance with his normal habits of thought, the writer felt himself compelled to base this position on Scripture. His choice and use of a passage are peculiar, and may suggest that he had great difficulty in finding the proper quotation. For the section cited from Ps. viii. 4–6 had originally no Messianic content. It is taken from a psalm whose theme is the glory of humanity in general, illustrated by the authority which man holds over the vegetable and animal worlds. Even the writer does not seem inclined to press the title **'son of man,'** and he might not have accepted the doctrine that Jesus was simply the representative man, summing up in Himself the whole race. But the phrases of the psalm, if not too closely pressed, will serve his purpose, and it may be doubted whether he could have found any other text which would fully suit his ends. We may note, also, in passing, that the Hebrew original would have been even less satisfactory to him than the rendering of the LXX (which, of course, he quotes), for the phrase rendered by the Greek version, **' For a little while Thou hast put him lower than the angels,'** runs literally in Hebrew ' Thou hast made him fall [but] little short of God.'

The writer has emphatically stated the superiority of Jesus to the **angels**, but he has to take into account the fact that Christ became man, and was known as man. Now the human

plane is obviously lower than the angelic, and it would seem that there might be a discrepancy between fact and theory at this point. The answer which the writer gives to this implied objection is to declare that we are now in a transition state. The whole purpose of God has long been formed, and the first steps have been taken towards its fulfilment. The plan necessarily (for reasons which will shortly appear) involved the *temporary* humiliation of Jesus—'**For a little while Thou hast put him lower than the angels.**' This is a part of the total scheme, and without it Jesus could not have completed His work. It does not affect His real and eternal pre-eminence, for He is for ever **crowned with glory and honour,** and as soon as the **little while** is past, He can resume His divine state, and take once more His seat **at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**[1]

The humiliation and re-exaltation of Jesus made only the first step. The whole process could not be complete until **all things** were **under His feet, controlled by** Him.[2] This is obviously not yet achieved, for though, in a certain sense, man may be said to be the lord of creation, and to control the whole of the known universe, yet Jesus is still far from being accepted and acclaimed as the King of all mankind. That His Kingdom will come, the writer has not the slightest doubt, and the Church through the ages has shared his confidence. Each generation of faithful souls, each succeeding century, each new age, has felt that it has drawn a little nearer than its predecessors to the final goal. Viewed over the year the progress is imperceptible, and even centuries may suggest stagnation or, possibly, retrograde movement. But, in general, when the longer periods are contemplated, it does become evident that there is a moving of the spirit of man, and we may be confirmed in our confidence that at long last **all things** shall be **under His feet.**

[1] i. 3.

[2] The reference here is not necessarily to man as the lord of creation. That is a possible interpretation, but not the only one, and while it may be argued that the passage is not intended to be Messianic, yet the phrase at the beginning of verse 7 is certainly referred to Christ, and this may justify us in believing that the writer intended to take the whole passage in the same sense. The exegesis is on the true Philonian model.

Signs of the final triumph are already to be seen by such as have insight into the nature of the divine plan. **We do see** something achieved, though, to the superficial eye it seems more like defeat than victory. Jesus, who is eternally **crowned with glory and honour** (as they stand these words are practically parenthetic), has been temporarily brought down to the lowest depths, and has not merely lived a life on the lower human plane, but has actually died a human death. Yet this is an essential part of the great purpose, and makes all the surer the final dominion. He submitted **that He might taste death for everyone.** This does not mean that He, by His death, acted as a substitute, and made it possible for men to avoid death ; rather it is because death is the common lot that He thus suffered.

So we are led up to the great paradox of verse 10—**' In bringing many sons to glory, it was befitting that He for whom and by whom the universe exists, should perfect the Pioneer of their salvation by suffering.'** In a certain sense we have in these words the centre of the writer's thought, and they are to be understood only in the light of the whole of his position. On the surface the language employed raises more than one fundamental question. We have first the suggestion that Jesus was not, save through His death, perfect, and we are tempted to suppose that the author regarded Him as a common, sinful man, whose own iniquity was purged by His suffering. Not only so, He also became the first to tread the path of salvation, and thus made it possible for others to follow Him. Such a view, however, is quite foreign to the author's thought ; he does not think of Jesus as sinful, for, though He was **tempted in every respect like ourselves,** yet He met and conquered His foe **without sinning.**[1] There is no suggestion of moral or spiritual stain. But we must distinguish between the two senses in which we may call a person **perfect.** On the one hand it may imply freedom from positive imperfection, i.e., in this instance, from sin. This, as we have seen, is not what the expression means here. But we may use the term rather in the sense of ' incomplete.' We can speak of a perfect

[1] iv. 15.

baby, but we cannot think of a baby as being the final form which a human being is intended to take. There is much more to be added by growth and experience before full stature is reached, and it is only the adult who can be called ' complete ' or ' perfect.' We may apply this to a special function ; a man may have nothing wrong with him, and yet be not wholly qualified for a particular task. It is only when we read the whole verse that this becomes clear ; it was through His suffering that Jesus was in a position to accomplish the task that made Him unique.

We turn next to the description of the work of Jesus. He is the **Pioneer of . . . salvation.** As we have seen, this can hardly mean that Jesus was the first to win salvation for Himself, and to show the way which others might follow. The Buddha is acclaimed by his followers as a pioneer in this sense, but there is a fundamental difference between Jesus and Buddha. It never entered the mind of the writer that Jesus needed to make atonement for Himself ; even when he might have mentioned the point in treating of the Temple ritual, he neither suggests nor refutes the possibility that Jesus needed to save Himself before He saved others. Such a view, indeed, would have been quite incompatible with his conception of a sinless Christ, and, throughout, the work of Jesus is regarded as being wholly altruistic. He is not so much the **Pioneer** as the ' author ' (this is the translation of the same Greek word in the familiar A.V. of xii. 2), or ' originator.' Man's **salvation** *began* with Jesus ; apart from Him and from what He did there could have been no real and valid **purification from sins.** The result is described in other language in this verse as **bringing many sons to glory,** and we notice at once that humanity stands in a definite relation to God. He is the creator of the whole universe, and He has made it for Himself, yet His chief concern in that universe is the glorification of His own children. At once we feel that the writer is, perhaps unconsciously, linking Jesus with the rest of mankind. He is the Son *par excellence,* but the rest of us are by nature His **brothers,** as he says in the next verse. And it is the task of the Christ to raise us, if not actually to His level,

at least to the sphere in which He dwells. That is where we ought to be; it is an awful fact that we are not where we should be, but through Jesus we may attain to the high position to which our divine sonship entitles us.

So we can understand and appreciate the author's point of view, and see the meaning of what might be an obscure saying. The supreme task that God has set before Himself is the redemption of mankind. This He seeks to accomplish through Jesus, who is thus to be the 'author' of our **salvation.** But, in order to play His part, Jesus must Himself pass through certain experiences, chief among which is the experience of suffering. **It was befitting** that God should inflict this upon His chosen agent, not because He needed to be punished for any misdeeds of His own, to make atonement for His own wrongdoing, or to be purified of His own stains by the cleansing fires of pain, but because without this experience He would have been incomplete as an author of **salvation.** It is a qualification without which His work would, in the nature of things, have been impossible, and therefore, impelled by the law of His own self-consistency, God could do no other than lay the Cross upon Him.

Is it possible for us to go further? The 'problem of suffering' is the greatest mystery with which the mind of man has yet been faced. Wherever men have begun to think about life and its meaning, and to contrast the good and the bad, the pleasant and the unpleasant, they have been compelled to ask themselves why suffering exists. That it should be remedial, that it should be punitive—these are explanations which readily occur to men, and are by some accepted as being a complete answer. But they leave unexplained whole areas of human experience, countless instances in which pain seems to work no good and to avenge no sin. The supreme illustration is to be seen in the Cross of Jesus, and here the problem presents itself in its most acute form, and most urgently demands a solution. Christian theology has advanced many possible explanations of the reason why Jesus must suffer for human redemption, and none has appealed to men as being wholly and completely satisfactory. Yet few would deny

that, from the Christian point of view, it is God Himself who suffers in and through Jesus. Human sin brings sorrow on many beside the actual sinner, yet, after all, the greatest sufferer in the universe is God Himself. In the last resort it is He who bears our sin, and, if He be, as we suppose, Love, it is His heart which is most surely broken by man's wrong.

Here, then, is a part, at least, of the answer that Christianity has to give to the problem of suffering. It is shared by God, and even deliberately chosen by Him, for the very existence of a free humanity seems to make it possible, if not inevitable. Here we have, at once, the great contrast between the Christian and every other serious treatment of the question. The sense that pain is the most terrible of all things, and that its presence implies moral evil, lies at the root of most human thinking on the matter, and is the actual basis on which Buddhism and similar practical philosophies are built up. But from the Christian point of view there is no necessary connexion between pain and moral evil; suffering, though we naturally seek to avoid or escape it (otherwise it would not be suffering), so far from being contrary to the will of a supremely good God, is actually a divine experience.

May we not venture further still? It is not given to man to assert with confidence what is, and what is not, necessary to the experience of God. Yet we may reverently conjecture that personality, whether human or divine, will have certain features and characteristics wherever it appears. And we know from our own experience that suffering means an enlargement of personality. One who has suffered greatly is not necessarily better than he would otherwise have been, but his nature is certainly more complete. We cannot avoid the feeling that one who had never suffered would be incompletely human. May it not, then, be equally possible that the experience of suffering is essential to the divine nature, that even God would not be God unless He knew pain? If so it would follow that the higher any individual stands in the order of being, the more necessary it is that he should suffer, and that Jesus, who stands so far above all else, should be made perfect only through suffering.

11 **For sanctifier and sanctified have all one origin. That is why**
12 **He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,**
'I will proclaim Thy name to My brothers,
in the midst of the church I will sing of Thee,'
13 **and again,**
'I will put my trust in Him,'
and again,
'Here am I and the children God has given Me.'
14 **Since the children then share blood and flesh, He Himself participated in their nature, so that by dying He might crush him who wields the power of death (that is to say,**
15 **the devil) and release from thraldom those who lay under**
16 **a life-long fear of death. (For of course it is not angels that**
17 *He succours*, **it is** *the offspring of Abraham.*) **He had to resemble His brothers in every respect, in order to prove a merciful and faithful high priest in things divine, to**
18 **expiate the sins of the People. It is as He suffered by His temptations that He is able to help the tempted.**

The preceding section concluded with a statement that Jesus could not have been a **perfect** author of human **salvation** unless He had undergone the experience of suffering. As we saw, there may be reasons for believing that the writer meant us to understand that there could be no complete personality, whether human or divine, apart from this experience. But whether that be so or not, there can be no doubt that, from his point of view, the practical knowledge of pain was a *sine qua non* for the adequate fulfilment of the redemptive function of Christ. And here we meet, for the first time, with what we may regard as the characteristic doctrine which this book presents as to the means whereby man's **salvation** is effected—in other words, a theory which, for want of a better name, we may call Atonement by Sympathy. It is interesting to observe that the writer's dialectic does not logically demand the expression of the view he holds. His argument is directed to showing that Jesus is the most perfect fulfilment of the principles of atonement implied in the Law, and the Law

never contemplated such a doctrine as this. It is all the more significant that the author cannot refrain from introducing it, and it reappears again and again. Whenever he thinks of Jesus, this is the thought which lies at the back of his mind, and he cannot prevent it from rising to expression.

At the heart of every religion there must be an atonement of some kind. For every form of faith presents the worshipper with an ideal relation to the object of his worship, which it is necessarily his aim to achieve and maintain. These aims are almost as various as the separate religions, but, in the nature of the case, the aim must dominate alike the theology and the ritual. There is, further, the universal fact of sin—something done or not done by the worshipper which makes the ideal temporarily or permanently impossible. A religion which did not offer some means of overcoming the man-made obstacle would perish in a generation, if it lasted so long.

Now Christianity, offering man the highest of all possible ideals, a moral union with a perfect God, at the same time offers an atonement which is unique. In all other forms of faith the barrier which men call sin is removed or overcome by human action—prayer, self-torture, sacrifice, or some other means. But the outstanding feature of Christianity is that the gulf is bridged, not from the human side, but from the divine, and all Christian theologians have seen in the death of Jesus the means whereby the Atonement is effected. A theology which was not centred in the Cross would not be Christian. There may be a very large number of explanations as to the way in which the sufferings of Christ achieve their purpose. **'This means My *covenant-blood* which is shed for many,'**[1] **'I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, Christ lives in me,'**[2] **'*He bore* our *sins* in His own body on the gibbet, that we might break with sin and live for righteousness,'**[3] **'Love lies in this, not in our love for Him but in His love for us—in the sending of His Son to be the propitiation for our sins'**[4]—these are typical statements which show how different thinkers in the early Church attempted to explain their belief. Their points of view are very different, yet

[1] Mark xiv. 24. [2] Gal. ii. 20. [3] 1 Pet. ii. 24. [4] 1 John iv. 10.

all agree in three outstanding features, the divine origin of Jesus (though this is less obvious in His own statement of the position than in the others), His Incarnation, and the consummation of His work in His death. Neither St. Paul nor St. John is oblivious to the second of these points—witness the great passage in Phil. ii. 6–8 and the criterion to be applied to the 'spirits' in 1 John iv. 2—but our writer does not see in it the final explanation of the whole position. To him it is the supreme fact which makes the Atonement possible. Jesus, already in this Epistle placed in His true relation to God, enters into human life so thoroughly and perfectly that He knows all human experience from the inside. It is that knowledge which enables Him to stand between man and God, and constitutes Him the mediator, the agent of atonement, the author of salvation. It is His sympathy with man which fits Him for His task, and, apart from that, His life and teaching would have been no more than a pattern which men might copy, and would have been bereft of all atoning quality.

Now to this writer, beside temptation, there was only one experience (or class of experiences) common to all humanity—suffering in its various forms. So it followed that the author of salvation must enter into this more than into any other element in human life. He must, though Himself sinless, suffer at least as much as the sinner, and know the meaning of the pain that follows sin. As long as man endures there must be none who can say to Him, 'I have suffered more than You; You cannot understand what I have been through; You do not know, save from the outside, what I have had to bear.' That, in the last resort, is the reason why **in bringing many sons to glory, it was befitting that He for whom and by whom the universe exists, should perfect the** author **of their salvation by suffering.**

That is the thought which is developed in verses 11–18. The writer is concerned to show that the sanctifier is of the same species and has the same experience as the sanctified. Jesus must be included in the same class as those He came to save. We have already had a hint of this in the use of the same word—son—for both parties,[1] and the suggestion is

[1] i. 2, 6, 8; ii. 10.

explicitly developed in the statement that both **have one origin.** In accordance with his usual custom, the writer now proceeds to demonstrate his position by reference to the Bible, quoting Ps. xxii. 22 and Isa. viii. 17, 18. The citations are not particularly apt; we should imagine that the author found no little difficulty in discovering Old Testament passages which would suit his case. The first is taken from a psalm which Christians would class as Messianic, if only because Jesus used its language in the hour of His last agony. But we may doubt whether it would appeal to Jewish readers in that sense. Granted, however, that the speaker is the Christ, it must be admitted that He uses the word **brothers** of the rest of the community to which He belongs. The suitability of the next citation is even more doubtful. The words occur in a passage where Isaiah is bidden seal up his utterances in the hearts of his disciples, and sees that the names which he and his sons bear are 'signs' to Judah. The clause taken from Isa. viii. 17 seems to have little or no bearing on the writer's argument, and was probably introduced because it begins the whole sentence to which the writer wished to call special attention. Even so the only link which can be found with the argument lies in the word **children.** But that serves as a peg on which to hang the proof of the position. The whole hypothesis requires that Jesus shall share in all that falls to those whom He came to **release.** They are flesh and blood, and He, therefore, must be like them in this respect; hence the Incarnation. But it is characteristic of physical humanity that it is mortal; Jesus, therefore, must die, that He may know the inner meaning of the last and most dreaded of man's earthly experiences.

Here we come upon a new thought, parenthetically inserted. Wherein does the **fear of death** lie? Not in the event itself; that was faced and conquered by the great pagans. The **power of death,** i.e. its ability to lay men under the **thraldom of fear,** is due to what may happen after death. It is noteworthy that our author does not contemplate the possibility that death means the immediate extinction of personality. That view had long since perished in Israelite thinking, at

least on its Pharisaic side, and there were schools of Greek philosophy to whom the immortality of the soul was a fundamental article of faith. Only one class of created beings was free from liability to death, and therefore from fear of what might befall thereafter; that was the **angels.** To them the Devil might be an enemy to be conquered, but the fact of their immortality placed them beyond the reach of his worst attacks. It is interesting to observe the eschatology implied in the passage; it seems that the wicked, after death, are simply handed over to the power of that evil which has made them what they are. Further, apart from the redemption which the death of Christ secures, the Devil has a claim on all men. We need not take too seriously the dualism which this sentence might suggest. The writer nowhere shows any sign of detracting in the least from the omnipotence of God, and he seems not to have noticed the discrepancy to which his language might lead. In practice, temptation is a very real and a very deadly thing, which must destroy men unless it be conquered. The victory can be achieved only when Jesus endures the worst that can happen to man, and dies. In His crucifixion the powers of evil have put forth their utmost strength in order to defeat Him, and they have failed.

Just because evil has failed with Jesus, it may fail with His **brothers.** His victory was not won in order to secure His own safety or His own elevation. Its purpose was that He might **succour** others, and defeat the adversary who holds them in **thraldom.** Again the writer emphasizes the fact that the accomplishment of this object was possible only because Jesus had submitted to all the conditions under which His **brothers** lived. For God to have conquered evil by some irresistible fiat of imperial omnipotence would have availed nothing, for it would not have been the triumph of *humanity*. No man can ever be as fully tempted as Jesus was, for the rest of us have all yielded long before the full strength of the enemy was put forth. And just because He has met and resisted every form of wrong that can beset mankind, He is able to stand beside those in peril and strengthen their resistance.

Here the author introduces an idea which is to be more fully developed later in his argument. Jesus is the great high priest, and two of His characteristics are suggested. The function of a high priest is to stand as the intermediary between God and man, that he may expiate the sins of the People. Jesus, therefore, faces in two directions, and in each He manifests the most necessary quality. As man sees Him, He is merciful, compassionate, with full understanding of human nature, its weaknesses and possibilities. He does not look on us with the eye of a judge upon the bench, or with that of some superior order of being. He knows us, and looks on life, with all its dangers, temptations and hopes, just as we do—sympathizes with us. And on the Godward side He is faithful. This does not mean—or does not mean merely—that He is reliable, but that He has shown Himself to have fulfilled all His duties towards God. Even in His human capacity He has never wavered in His fidelity, and one of the striking features of the picture of Jesus, as drawn by this writer, is the way in which He maintained a consistent obedience to the will of God in life and in death. It was, indeed, only in the Cross and in the hours that preceded it that complete faithfulness to the divine will was ever manifested on earth. So, from whichever side we regard Him, whether in the earthly or in the heavenly aspect of His priesthood, He is flawless.

III. iii. 1–iv. 13: Jesus, the New Moses and the New Joshua

The first two chapters of this book may be regarded as introductory to the main argument. Jesus has been given His rightful place in the scheme of the universe, and in the divine plan for the salvation of mankind. Some evidence of the position to be adopted has been adduced from the Scriptures, though the logic would sometimes be convincing only to the convinced. Now the author is ready to advance on his main dialectic task, which is to show how Jesus is to be the

fulfilment of the old Law in its most important aspect. In order to demonstrate this, the writer goes back to the very origin of that Law, and points out how much greater Jesus was than the ancient hero through whom, according to Jewish belief, it was first given to Israel. But the Law itself was designed, not for a wilderness community, but for a settled and organized agricultural and commercial nation. Hence it could not have its real effect until the people had entered the promised land, and found a rest from their wanderings. We must, therefore, have a reference to Joshua, the great military leader who succeeded Moses, and gave the tribes that rest which might enable them properly to undertake the full practice of the Law. He too, mighty as he was, and significant as was his function, must take a place far below Jesus, since a comparison of the work done by the two shows that the former accomplished something partial and temporary, while the other achieved a triumph which is perfect and eternal.

iii.

1 **Holy brothers, you who participate in a heavenly calling, look**
at Jesus then, at the apostle and high priest of our con-
2 **fession ; He is faithful to Him who appointed him. For**
while Moses also was *faithful in every department of God's*
3 ***house*, Jesus has been adjudged greater glory than Moses,**
inasmuch as the founder of a house enjoys greater honour
4 **than the house itself. (Every house is founded by some-**
5 **one, but God is the founder of all.) Besides, while Moses**
was *faithful in every department of God's house* as an
attendant—by way of witness to the coming revelation—
6 **Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house.**

Now we are this house of God, if we will only keep confident and proud of our hope.*

* Omitting μεχρὶ τέλους βεβαίαν, which has probably been inserted from verse 14, where the same words occur in a similar connexion.

If we had to single out a phrase which, more than any other in the book, summarized its content and purpose, we should not be far wrong if we took the words found in ii. 17—**a merciful and faithful high priest in things divine, to expiate**

the sins of the People. One term from this description of Jesus—the **faithful high priest**—now engrosses the author's attention. He naturally thinks of Moses, who was the founder, not only of the nation and of its religion, but also of every detail, including the most important, the priesthood. The conception of Moses as priest is apt to be overlooked in studying the early history of Israel, partly because Moses has so many other aspects, and partly because the priestly functions are more generally associated with Aaron. Yet the priesthood of Moses is fundamental. Before the appointment of Aaron (as the present form of the narrative tells us), Moses exercised the priestly functions, both in matters strictly religious and in the equally ecclesiastical rôle of judge. And it was he who appointed Aaron, thereby transferring some of his own duties to him. Aaron was held to derive his office from Moses, in whom the priestly line and order had their true source. Aaron will take his place later in the argument, but for the moment the writer's thought goes back to the origin of all priesthood in Israel, and finds it properly in Moses. He does not dwell on this aspect of the great founder's work; all that concerns him is to show that, whatever functions Moses had to perform, he stood lower than Jesus.

The passage selected for proof of this position is (for this writer) unusually apt. It consists of some words taken from Num. xii. 7, where Yahweh says of Moses, '**He was faithful in every department of my house.**' Here the context adds to the force of the citation. Aaron and Miriam have revolted against the unique position held by Moses, and Yahweh insists that he holds a place superior, not only to theirs, but also to that of every prophet who shall come after him. To others Yahweh would and did reveal Himself in dream or in vision, but with Moses He communed face to face, thus giving him a standing unique in the whole history of revelation. But Jesus is higher still, for, though Moses did thus receive a position unparalleled in Israel, it was yet far lower than that of the Christ.

The metaphor employed is that of a household. The language used makes it clear that it is not the actual fabric of

the **house** which is before the writer's mind, but rather the *personel* which goes to make up its inhabitants. It is the family, the human group, which is in question, not the material structure, for the words rendered **founder, founded,** never refer in biblical Greek to the bricks, stone, or wood, used in the actual construction of a building. In ancient times the **house** was the Israelite nation; in the latter days it is a spiritual entity composed of those who **keep confident and proud of** their **hope,** for, says the writer, **' we are this house of God.'** We have here an assumption which, as a matter of fact, underlies the whole of the thought of this Epistle, and must be kept always in the background of our minds if we would fully understand it. Israel was, so to speak, simply a forerunner, perhaps only an adumbration, of the Church which was to be, and all that could be said of the ancient people belongs in a deeper and truer sense to the great invisible body of believers. They might not be of the physical seed of Abraham, but they were none the less his heirs. They might not conform outwardly to the forms of Jewish law and worship (it is curious that we have no reference to the old quarrel over circumcision; St. Paul could not possibly have avoided all mention of it!), but they must accept the spiritual implications of Judaism, and transfer its prescriptions from the literal to the eternal sphere. The **house** is thus a comprehensive term, including the father, the children, and the servants—indeed the whole spiritual community, with all its elements.

The contrast between Jesus and Moses is then brought out in two ways. In the first place, Moses was a member of the **house,** one of those who were included in the family. But Jesus was not a mere member; He was the actual founder and head of the whole (verse 4 must be regarded as parenthetic, and it is at variance with the general argument, unless we are to suspect that the writer in some way wished to identify Jesus with **God**). Now the **founder** of a household or family is necessarily a greater person than any other of its members, indeed greater than the whole **house.** It is from him that it derives its existence, and its members can claim the rights and privileges which they enjoy, only in so far as

they stand in some definite relation to the founder, either by ties of blood or in some other way. Children, wives, slaves, hired servants, all belong to the **house**, but they do so because each has a specific connexion with the head of the family, and, apart from him, the **house** would not exist at all. Now Moses was a member of the **house**, but Jesus was its **founder** and head. Seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, even Moses derived his position and his authority from his relation to, and from his appointment by, the eternal Christ. As a part of the **house**, he necessarily took a lower position than He who brought the **house** into existence, and, by His continued presence, maintained it. It is true that he had a unique standing in the community, but this only the more clearly emphasized the supreme place which must be accorded to the Jesus who stood so far above him.

The second line of argument is, perhaps, a little difficult to harmonize with the first ; we should by now have learnt not to expect too high a degree of logical consistency from our author. Here Jesus is no longer so much the **founder** of the **house** as one of its members. Even so, the contrast between His position and that of Moses is strongly marked. For the latter was an **attendant** (the Hebrew word in Num. xii. 7 means literally ' slave '), and so occupied a subordinate place. It is true that he had great authority, but a slave might well be entrusted with an important function, such as that of steward, in the ancient world. But he could never take the place of a **Son**, save by a fictitious process of adoption, and, where there were legitimate free children this method of maintaining the family would not naturally be followed. Jesus, on the other hand, was a **Son**, and, therefore, inevitably took a higher authority than any servant could possibly do. For a time, until the right moment in history arrived, the **attendant** might hold the position of supreme authority, but as soon as the true Heir came into His own, He took His rightful place **as a Son over God's house.**

Here, then, is drawn the contrast which makes Jesus immeasurably superior to the greatest figure in Israel's religious history. Yet there is a certain similarity between

the two ; they are alike in that they were **faithful** in the discharge of their functions. As far as Moses was concerned, this is attested by the words of Scripture which have been quoted ; the faithfulness of Jesus invites further comment. He stands in a special relation to the other members of the **house.** They, that is the members of the true family, the faithful believers, are **brothers,** not only of Christ (a thought which has already been developed), but of one another and of the writer. Since they are included in the family, they are **holy,** and **participate in a heavenly calling.** We sometimes feel, as we read our New Testament, that we cannot escape from a doctrine of predestination. There are reasons for this. A man who has known the wonder and the glory of the love of God as shown to him personally cannot bring himself to believe that the privilege offered to him is a reward or a result of any merit or action of his own. Knowing himself, he feels himself to be utterly unworthy of it, and, however great may have been his self-confidence and self-satisfaction, when once he has really seen the gift of God, especially as manifested in the Cross of Christ, it appeals to him as a free and groundless example of divine liberality. He sees that there are those around him who have not shared his experience, and he cannot bring himself to believe that there is anything in him (or in them) which can account for what has been conferred on him and denied to them. There is only one possible explanation ; for some inscrutable reason, God has chosen him to be the recipient of this priceless boon, has selected, **called** him, set him apart, made him **holy.** For all holiness implies separation. There has been a distinction made, and a man knows himself to have been *set apart* to receive what has not been conferred on others, and to occupy a relation to God which is not shared by all mankind.

The special gift which constitutes the **heavenly calling** lies in the relation between Jesus and His followers. He is **the apostle and high priest of** their **confession.** He has been definitely sent to them by God, not simply as an ambassador, but as a plenipotentiary. They need to know nothing of God and of His will beyond what Jesus can tell them, and they

require no other evidence of God's readiness to bestow His favour upon them. As He faces man, He is the **apostle** of God.

But Jesus is also the **high priest** of the **confession**, i.e. of the religion, held by the writer and his readers. Here His function is to represent man to God, to stand on the human side and do whatever is necessary to **expiate the sins of the People.** Much will be said later on the details of this high-priesthood, and we need not dwell on the subject now. It is enough to note that what the writer has in view the whole time is the ritual of the Day of Atonement, whereby all the unexplained and unexpiated sin of the priest and of the people was removed. That is the task of Jesus too, but His realm is far wider than that of the high priest, since it covers all sins and all men.

In both these capacities Jesus has shown Himself **faithful to Him who appointed Him.** Both as **apostle** and as **high priest** He has been appointed by God. The world's redemption was not accomplished by any act of man, nor on any human initiative ; it is God who has done all. The original plan was His, the means were His, and the love was His that impelled Him to the task. It is, therefore, to God **who appointed Him** that Jesus has been primarily responsible, and it is God to whom He has been found **faithful.** He has done all that was required of Him, and has completed the work which was given Him to do. Moses, within the limits of the duties laid upon him, was **faithful,** and his work could not have been better done. But Jesus manifested the same fidelity, though His standing was immeasurably higher than that of Moses, and His task infinitely more difficult and exacting. Therefore **Jesus has been adjudged greater glory than Moses.**

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 7
To-day, when you hear His voice,
harden not your hearts as at the Provocation, 8
on the day of the Temptation in the desert,
where your fathers put Me to the proof, 9
and for forty years felt what I could do.
Therefore I grew exasperated with that generation, 10

I said, 'They are always astray in their heart':
They would not learn My ways;
11 *so I swore in My anger,*
'they shall never enter My Rest.'

12 **Brothers, take care in case there is a wicked, unbelieving**
heart in any of you, moving you to apostatize from the
13 **living God. Rather admonish one another daily, so long**
as this word *To-day* **is uttered, that none of you may be**
14 **deceived by sin and** *hardened.* **For we only participate in**
Christ provided that we keep firm to the very end the
15 **confidence with which we started, this word ever sounding**
in our ears,

To-day, when you hear His voice,
harden not your hearts as at the Provocation.

16 **Who heard and yet** *provoked* **Him? Was it not all who left**
17 **Egypt under the leadership of Moses? And with whom was**
He *exasperated for forty years***? Was it not with those who**
18 **sinned, whose** *corpses fell in the desert***? And to whom**
***did He swear that they would never enter His Rest*? To**
19 **whom but those who disobeyed? Thus we see it was**
owing to unbelief that they could not enter.

As in a number of other places, the writer, having laid down the general principle of the superiority of Jesus to another religious authority, now proceeds to practical exhortation based thereon. But here his exhortation is not independent of the main argument, but is interwoven with it, since it leads up to his next point, i.e. the superiority of Jesus over Joshua. As usual, there is a proof-passage, in this instance taken from Ps. xcv. 7–11. We notice that the quotation is introduced by the phrase **as the holy Spirit says,** which is quite in accord with the writer's view of inspiration. The passage comes from one of the later psalms, in which we have a historical retrospect, and it is clear that this form of the story suits the author's purpose better than a reference to Exodus or to Numbers would have done.

The psalmist has linked together two incidents from the story of Israel in the wilderness. The first is an event which

took place before the giving of the Law at the sacred mountain, the second followed that experience. In the one case the people, in despair over the lack of water, murmured against Moses,[1] who brought water from the rock for them. The other incident is that of the spies, who brought an unsatisfactory report of the land, with the result that the people refused to undertake an immediate invasion. But, though the two incidents are thus very different from one another, both serve to illustrate a permanent feature of Israel's spiritual life during the whole period of the wanderings—their lack of faith. In the one case they refused to believe that Yahweh could save them from the perils of thirst, and in the other they failed to rely on His ability to overcome their enemies, however great and powerful these might be. So **for forty years** they **felt** what their God **could do,** seeing how He could guide, reward, and punish. They had left Egypt with the hope that some day they might **enter Rest,** and find a lasting home in the promised land. But their unbelief brought down on them the **anger** of God, who **swore ' they shall never enter My Rest.'**

These two incidents, thus combined by the psalmist, are used by him as a basis for an appeal to the men of his own day. Once more, he feels, an opportunity is offered to his people. We have no means of knowing the precise circumstances under which the psalm was composed, but it is not likely that its author contemplated the eternal rest of heaven. Yet this is the sense in which our author takes his words. He dwells for a moment on the **To-day** of the psalmist. That is the day of Grace, the day of opportunity. It is not to be measured by human standards of time :

> **With God a day endures alway,**
> **A thousand years are but a day.**

Though the psalmist may have lived centuries before the time of our writer, he feels that the opportunity of **to-day** is still there. Yet there is a limit to the time during which **this word *To-day* is uttered** ; any man who presumes on its indefinite endurance

[1] The writer of this book, following the LXX, has translated the place-name Massa as ' *Provocation.*'

is deceived by sin and *hardened*. That some, possibly all, of those who have believed (and the writer is addressing a converted Christian community throughout) will attain to the **Rest** is beyond doubt, yet there is the danger that others may be possessed by **a wicked, unbelieving heart, moving them to apostatize from the living God.** There is a certain assonance between the Greek words for **unbelieving** and **apostatize** which serves to bring out their intimate connexion. For belief is not merely an intellectual matter, a question of the maintenance or the abandonment of an opinion; it is a vital relationship with God, and its loss is necessarily a separation from Him.

It is characteristic of this writer that he holds apostasy to be irrevocable and unpardonable. His view is more clearly and more terribly expressed later,[1] but it is implied here. We are reminded of the doctrine of Ezekiel,[2] though our author's sternness is tempered with a sympathy which we miss in the prophet. It adds an urgency and an impressiveness to his appeal, which make us feel its force, even if we cannot share the theological view which underlies it. To **participate in Christ** is the goal and ideal of the readers. He is the priceless possession which they may share; they may, in a certain sense, own Him as their common property. They know already something of what this boon means, for they have begun to have a **confidence.** That is something which will form an underlying basis for them, a solid ground on which they may take their stand. The word is that used in xi. 1, where **faith** is defined as that which makes men **confident** of **what** they **hope for.** It is the 'earnest' of that which is to come, giving at once a foretaste and an assurance of the glorious future. That is something which they have already received, and on that they can rely. It is a treasure which no one can take from them, though they may themselves throw it away, and it is there that the danger lies. For they will not, and cannot, attain to the complete realization of the Rest unless they **keep firm to the very end the confidence with which** they **started.** If they once lose their grip, they

[1] vi. 4–8. [2] Cp. Ezek. xviii. 26.

forfeit, not only the bliss to which they had looked forward, but that measure of it which has been already theirs.

The warning is emphasized by a series of trenchant questions, of which the purpose is to show more exactly where the peril is. The Israelites had received the ground for their **confidence** in the miraculous deliverance from Egypt **under the leadership of Moses.** They had been, then, in a position as favourable as that of the Christians to whom the writer is addressing himself. Yet they had **exasperated** God, and their *corpses fell in the desert.* Clearly their fate was the direct punishment for some sin, and the offence is doubly defined. In the first place it lay in the fact that they **disobeyed** the command of their God, when He bade them enter the promised land directly from the south. That was the obvious and outward form which their evil-doing took, but it was based on a deeper and more subtle disease of the soul, for **it was owing to unbelief that they could not enter.**

As we have noted, there is a resemblance between the Greek words for **disobeyed** and **unbelief,** and in the last resort they are probably to be traced back to the same root. Faith has many different forms, and it is worth noting that the aspect of it which impressed this writer is not that, for instance, which appealed to St. Paul. To the great Apostle faith meant the exercise of the power to see through the appearance into the reality, through phenomena into that which lay behind. But it did not stop there. To him it was essentially a personal matter, and involved an appreciation of an unseen personality, together with a consecration to, and a moral union with, Him who was thus perceived. When he said, **' the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me,'** he was but repeating and amplifying the statement **' it is no longer I who live, Christ lives in me,'**[1] and the content of faith, as he understood it, must be interpreted in the light of this experience. But the author of Hebrews thinks here of confidence in a person[2]—one element in the wider Pauline conception. Because Yahweh had ordered Israel to invade Canaan, He necessarily would see to

[1] Gal. ii. 20. [2] For a much wider view, cp. xi. 1 ff.

it that their assault was successful. If they had really trusted in their God, they would have accepted His command as implying a promise of co-operation which would make success inevitable. That would have been faith. As a matter of fact, the generation to whom the order in question came **disobeyed,** and, thereby, proved their **unbelief.**

To writers of the Old Testament (and our author is thoroughly imbued with their spirit) sin inevitably brought punishment. This did not mean that for every breach of the divine Law there was an arbitrarily selected penalty imposed by irresponsible omnipotence. In a very real sense sin was its own punishment, for, while men see the two events as being distinct, they are, in reality, only different sides of one and the same thing. Sin is a living and a vigorous entity, almost a personality, and the worst thing that can happen to a sinner is that he should be delivered over to his sin. When Moses warns the Reubenites and Gadites[1] that they will suffer if they hold aloof from their brethren, the form his threat takes is 'be sure your sin will find you out.' The punishment is the inevitable outcome of the wrongdoing, and is but another aspect of the self-consistency of Yahweh. If, as Hosea puts it, men sow the wind, they can reap only the whirlwind. So here, since **all who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses** betrayed an **unbelief** which restrained them from entering the promised land, the only possible issue was that they should **never enter His Rest.** Had God allowed them to take possession of the land, holding the view they did of Him and of His power, He would have been inconsistent with Himself, and would have been false to the one law which binds Him—the law of His own nature. When a mother says to a child, 'If you are late for school to-day, you shall not go to the party to-morrow,' she is imposing a purely arbitrary sanction, and setting up an artificial connexion between the offence and the penalty. But the judgements of God are expressions of an intimate and indissoluble connexion between the act and its consequences, and are as invariable and as inexorable as the laws of physical nature. By their act of disobedience the

[1] Num. xxxii. 23.

fugitive Israelites had made themselves incapable of conquest; it was not God's act but theirs which made the achievement of their hopes impossible. They were not merely prevented by Yahweh from entering **His Rest; owing to unbelief they *could* not enter.**

iv.

Well then, as the promise of entrance into His Rest is still left to 1
us, let us be afraid of anyone being judged to have missed
it. For we have had the good news as well as they; only, 2
the message they heard was of no use to them, because it
did not meet with* faith in the hearers. For we do *enter* 3
***the Rest* by our faith : according to His word,**

As I swore in My anger,
they shall never enter My Rest—

although *His works* were all over by the foundation of the
world. For He says this somewhere about the seventh 4
day : *And God rested from all His works on the seventh*
day*. And again in this passage, *they shall never enter My 5
***Rest*. Since then it is reserved for some *to enter it*, and** 6
since those who formerly got the good news failed to
enter owing to their disobedience, He again fixes a day;
***To-day*—as He says in 'David' after so long an interval** 7
and as has been already quoted—

To-day, when you hear His voice,
harden not your hearts.

Thus if Joshua had given them Rest, God would not speak 8
later about another day. There is a sabbath-Rest, then, 9
reserved still for the People of God (for once *a man enters* 10
***His rest*, he *rests from work* just as God did).**
Let us be eager then *to enter that Rest*, in case anyone falls into 11
the same sort of disobedience.

* Reading συγκεκερασμένος or συγκεκραμένος with ℵ, the Old Latin, the Peshitto, etc.

The writer now turns to practical exhortation, which is inextricably interwoven with his argument. He has been dealing with history, but history to him is never merely a matter of the past; it is an expression of eternal laws and principles.

It follows, therefore, that his readers may find themselves in a situation similar to that of the Israelites **who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses.** They have the same opportunities and run the same risks. The refusal to enter Palestine was but a symbol on the earthly plane of what may happen to anyone in the spiritual realm, for the one is but an illustration and a shadow of the other.

The existence of a **Rest** is a fact of eternal validity. For it is not merely the object of a human hope ; it is an element in divine experience. The writer goes back to the beginning of things, and, quoting with a characteristic indifference to the actual book in which the divine word is enshrined, he cites from Gen. ii. 2 the words, **' And God rested from all His works on the seventh day.'** The thought of the original Hebrew is, of course, not so much that of **rest** as that of cessation, but, in the connexion in which the writer uses the passage, this is quite in order. For the **rest** that he has in view is not simply a means of refreshment which shall enable a worker once more to shoulder his burden and to resume his task with renewed vigour and energy. That is the kind of **rest** which Jesus offers in His great invitation—**' Come unto Me, all who are labouring and burdened, and I will refresh you,'**[1] but our author has a different thought in his mind. He pictures a period of toil which, though it may be long, yet has a definite end. A time will come when all the work is over, all the tasks accomplished, and the old laborious stage is definitely ended. Such, in the experience of God, was the period of creation ; that completed, He **rested on the seventh day.** Such, transferred to the human plane, was the **rest** which Israel enjoyed after the wanderings in the wilderness. It is the same thing, seen from a different point of view, and enjoyed in another realm, the temporal instead of the eternal, for God spoke of it as **' My Rest,'** and the **rest** of God can be seen in its perfection only on the conclusion of His work in creation.

We have, then, the conception of a divine and archetypal **rest,** which belongs by nature to God, but which He would share with His creatures. The fact that He could contemplate

[1] Matt. xi. 28.

the possibility that men should enter His Rest, shows that He is prepared to bestow it on them, or at least on such of them as can be called the People of God. The offer remains open till it is fully accepted, and sooner or later the time will come when men shall know by experience what the rest of God means. There is, therefore, a short history of the rest of God, and of the human approach towards its realization.

It appeared first in the story of early Israel, and, as we have already seen, it was not realized by those to whom it was presented owing to their disobedience. So the message they heard was of no use to them, because it did not meet with faith in the hearers, and the promise remained unfulfilled, the gift was still available for the People of God. A generation later there came another opportunity, when Israel, purged by time and death of its unbelieving elements, once more approached the borders of the promised land. She had learnt her lesson, and was no longer disobedient, with the result that, under the leadership of Joshua, she succeeded where she had previously failed, and made the land her own. This was the end of her wanderings in the wilderness, and, to all outward appearance, she had achieved an experience similar to that which God Himself enjoyed when He rested from all His works on the seventh day of creation. It seemed that Joshua had given them Rest.

Yet the appearance was fallacious. Centuries passed, and an inspired writer, whose words are to be found in that portion of Scripture which Jews of our author's day comprehensively called 'David,' showed that the true Rest had not yet been attained by the People of God. What Israel had won was a purely human cessation of the toils of travel; what was actually offered was a 'rest divine.' So strongly does the writer feel the contrast that he coins a word—sabbath-Rest—which shall emphasize the fact that once a man enters His rest, he rests from work just as God did. The first recipients of the offer had failed to understand fully what it was that they could have had, for, though the immediate gift held out to them was the temporal Rest which came with the conquest, yet a further possession, and that an eternal one, would have been accorded them but for their disobedience. This becomes

clear when we realize what is implied in the language of verses 2 and 6—**'we have heard the good news as well as they'—'those who formerly got the good news.'** For the writer uses a term which has become specialized to us—and, probably, to the writer and his readers—in the sense of the **good news** that Jesus came to bring, in other words, the Gospel. It was only there that the full meaning and import of the divine **Rest** became manifest.

The psalmist whom the writer has quoted had already made this clear. To him the conquest of Canaan was now in the distant past, and though **Joshua had given** Israel a certain **Rest,** it was but a foretaste, an earnest, of the final **sabbath-Rest . . . reserved for the People of God.** That which is visible on earth is but the shadow and emblem of a reality which exists in heaven; our author is imbued with the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, to which we shall have occasion to refer later. So, even when the psalm quoted was written, it was possible for the poet to speak of the offer as being still open to men. Otherwise he would not have used the word **To-day** in making his appeal to his contemporaries. And, after all, it was not a mere man who was responsible for the phrase; it was **God** who thus spoke **later about another day.**

It was not given to the psalmist to see the consummation of the divine **Rest.** Once more centuries have elapsed, and the writer of the Epistle, wholly unconscious of the fact that men would some day regard him as he regarded the author of Ps. xcv., knows that the offer is still open to men, and that they can appreciate it as no previous age could do. Moses, Joshua, the psalmist—all these belong to the category of the **prophets,** of whom we heard in the first verse of the Epistle. But now God **has spoken . . . by a Son,** and, in proportion as the **Son** is greater than the **prophets,** so is the fresh form of the **good news** more complete, more attractive, more urgent, than the old. **The promise of entrance is still left,** the **word** To-day is **ever sounding,** and the door that leads to the eternal **Rest** still stands wide. Yet there is a danger. Ancient Israel, in Moses' day, had failed to win the **Rest** offered to them, and it does not follow, even now, that all to whom the **good news**

comes will enter. The sinners whose corpses fell in the desert may have their successors—and the writer, his readers—even we ourselves—may be among the number. We, too, may fall into the same sort of disobedience. In the last analysis, when all things appear in their true light and fall into their proper perspective, we, too, may be shown to have failed. We may have postponed our effort till it was too late, we may have been half-hearted and fallen short of the goal, we may have allowed ourselves to be in some other way lacking. The possibility and danger is that we may be judged to have missed it.

For the Logos of God is a living thing, active and more cutting 12
than any sword with double edge, penetrating to the very division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow—scrutinizing the very thoughts and conceptions of the heart. And 13
no created thing is hidden from Him ; all things lie open and exposed before the eyes of Him with whom we have to reckon.

The last paragraph began with a reference to the discriminating power which decides who is, and who is not, judged to have missed the promise of entrance. In two pregnant sentences the power of the judge is briefly sketched. It is the Logos of God, a term which may be interpreted in any one of a number of ways. Its literal sense is simply that of a ' word,' a vocal expression of the thought in a speaker's mind. But it very readily extends its significance, and comes to include almost any form in which the inner idea is made manifest. Thus we commonly use the term ' Word of God ' in reference to Scripture, and that is one of the possible interpretations here, though not the most probable. If it be correct, however, we have a daring and vivid personification of the Bible (i.e. of the Old Testament) as the standard and norm by which men's life, actions, and faith are to be tested. But the writer does not lay this kind of stress on the Old Testament. It is, of course, of supreme importance to him, and is directly and divinely inspired, but he always speaks of it as a channel

through which the Holy Spirit communicates with man, as an instrument which God uses for the instruction of His people, never, elsewhere, as a personal entity with powers and functions of its own.

Another interpretation, which has found favour with some of those best qualified to form an authoritative opinion, is that the term implies (as one of them has said[1]) 'the Christian Gospel declared authoritatively by men like the writer, an inspired message which carries on the Old Testament revelation of God's promises and threats, and which is vitally effective.' If this be the sense intended, then we have in the remainder of the section a very striking description of the place taken by the Gospel in human life. Men will be judged by their attitude to it, by their willingness to accept it, and to exercise the faith which will bring them within the range of its promises.

The writer's familiarity with the Jewish-Alexandrian philosophy (which is, in general, beyond dispute) suggests a third possibility. The 'Word' or '**Logos**' was a technical term, inherited from the Greek philosophers, to denote the creative reason which is to be observed both in nature and in man. The thought has a long history, and may, ultimately, be traced back to Plato, though he did not employ the term in its later sense. It was identified by Philo with the Hebrew conception of Wisdom, and, since the thought is fundamental to the understanding of some aspects of Christian doctrine, it may be worth our while to glance at its history from the Jewish side.

A religious philosophy is always faced with two main problems. One is to explain the relation between the world and its Maker—the problem of Creation. The other is to explain the mode by which God enters into human life and makes Himself known to man—the problem of Communion. As long as Israel lived and thought on a comparatively primitive plane, and maintained an anthropomorphic conception of God, the solution of these problems was easy. God made the world just as any workman of supreme ability and

[1] Moffatt, *Hebrews*, p. 55.

intelligence might have done. It was the work of His hands, and the naïve story of creation told in Gen. ii. bears witness to this old type of belief. So when God wished to communicate with man directly, He assumed a human form, a doctrine which is attested in many Old Testament stories. But with the advance towards a less material and more spiritual theology, these explanations no longer sufficed. Creation was the work of an efficient word, uttered by God :

> **He spake, and it was done ;**
> **He commanded, and it stood fast.**[1]

This is the stage in Hebrew thought represented by the creation-story of Gen. i. But, as men noted the order in the universe, they recognized the existence of a Mind beneath it, and spoke of

> **Him that by wisdom made the heavens.**[2]

This was, as a matter of fact, much nearer to the Greek conception of the Word than the Hebrew use of that term, and it was the idea of Wisdom which predominated over the idea of Power, at least among the serious thinkers in Israel. Gradually, as in Prov. viii. and, possibly, in Job xxviii., Wisdom became personified, and, in the Jewish-Alexandrian book known as the *Wisdom of Solomon*, attained to the position of a subordinate personality within the being of God. It was at this stage that Philo took up the idea, and, steeped as he was in Plato and his successors, especially the Stoics, he identified the Hebrew Wisdom with the Greek Word. The climax was reached when the writer of the Fourth Gospel identified this Word with Jesus Himself.

Our writer, however, has not reached that stage, for we may be sure that one so familiar with Alexandrian thought and so eager to establish the supremacy of Jesus would at least have alluded to the doctrine. (Incidentally we may observe that we have here evidence of the comparatively early date at which the Epistle was composed.) But he may have accepted the doctrine of the Logos in a semi-Philonian form, and regarded it as a divine emanation, or even as an

[1] Ps. xxxiii. 9. [2] Ps. cxxxvi. 5.

almost personified element in the Godhead, giving to it the function (as would be natural) of judgement and discrimination. But we cannot assert that this was actually the view the author took ; he may have had both of the other two mentioned in his mind and combined them without clearly distinguishing between them. If so, this would not be the only place where he uses an ambiguous word in both its senses at once.

But, whatever may have been the exact import of the term, it is clear that the writer is contemplating the judicial power of God which can discern and discriminate between those that are to be approved and those that are to be found ' missing ' the true aim of mankind. The gravity of the situation is emphasized by the characteristics of the **Logos.** It is a **living thing,** in contrast to the ' dead,' mechanical, systems and theories on which men may form their judgements. It is not a rule which another can apply ; it has within itself all the powers and forces which are required for its work. In one aspect it may be held to be law, since it affords the norm by which all may be judged. But it is far more than this ; it is also the judge and the court which investigate the facts, weigh the evidence, and pronounce sentence. It is **active,** a term which implies far more than the English word suggests. It means that it has within itself a source of energy. It is an extension of the statement that the **Logos** is **living,** and stresses one aspect of life, the ability to act without the help of an externally impressed force. It is like a piece of machinery which carries its own engine and so supplies its own power. Next the writer dwells on the keenness of its discrimination, and likens it to a sword. A modern author might have thought of a scalpel, for the task is primarily one of dissection. Everything in man can be taken apart, analysed and studied, so that an infallible judgement can be reached. There is no secret of **the heart** which is impenetrable to it nor can any man hope to escape its scrutiny. Its range covers all creation ; **all things lie open and exposed,** as a wrestler's face is turned upwards by the pressure of his antagonist's arm beneath his chin. Here we

note how swiftly the author passes from the conception of the **Logos** to that of God Himself, and it seems almost as if he identified the two. The pronouns in verse 13 must refer to God and not, more explicitly, to the **Logos**, since that very Greek word is used in the last clause—**with whom we have to reckon** is literally ' unto whom is our *logos*.' Here the word is obviously used in a sense very different from that in which it is employed in verse 12, and suggests a metaphor from commercial dealings. In the last resort man must always reckon with God, and God, through His **Logos**, can and will see that everything is taken into account. It is useless to hope that any act of disobedience or want of faith will be ignored, for all things are manifest to God.

IV. iv. 14–vii. 28 : Jesus the High Priest

The writer has now passed through all the stages which we may call preliminary, and has reached the point on which he proposes to lay the greatest stress. He has looked all round the history and the polity of Israel, and has allowed himself a gradually enlarging treatment of each point as it has arisen. In every case his main concern has been to show how the old dispensation was but a shadow of the new, the earthly but a faint adumbration of the heavenly. Thus he has sought to establish the superiority of Jesus to every other form of divine revelation, and to every other personality in heaven or in earth, save only God Himself. At the same time he has never lost sight of the practical aim which he has in view, that of establishing the faith of his readers and of warning them of the danger they would run in rejecting Jesus, who stands alone as the **pioneer**, the author and founder of salvation.

Salvation means being right with God, attaining to the ideal set before men, eliminating the baleful effects of sin. All else in religion must centre round this element. For every religion sets before its adherents an ideal relationship between the worshipper and the object of his worship. Every religion is faced with the practical fact of sin—something in man or in

his conduct which makes the ideal temporarily or permanently unattainable. Every religion, therefore, must offer man a way by which this fact of sin may be overcome, and the ideal reached in spite of it. So, at the heart of every faith there must be something which we may call an atonement, though in most instances we must beware of reading into the term any of its Christian associations.

Now the old Jewish Law had provided a means of atonement, a method whereby the results of sin might be eliminated, and the favour of God recovered even by the sinner. Foremost in the prescribed rules for the achievement of the atonement stood the personality of the high priest. Leaving on one side all other forms of the ritual, the author concentrates on the great Day of Atonement, the occasion on which the people as a whole were purged of their sin. Individuals must make their peace with God for their own failures, and the Day of Atonement was felt to be of no avail to men who had sinned deliberately and had made no attempt to be purified of their private wrongdoing. But when full allowance was made for all the conscious sin of men and women, there still remained a mass of impurity attaching to the nation as a whole, and defiling the very springs of their spiritual life. This could be removed only by special arrangements, and the gap in the religious life of Israel was filled by the Day of Atonement.

One of the characteristic features of the special ritual of the day was the fact that the central parts of it could be performed only by the high priest. It is not too much to say that he existed solely for this purpose, for every other priestly function could be discharged by any of the family of Aaron, and for the normal routine of the religious ceremonial no essential difference was made between one priest and another. At other times the priests stood all on the same level, and no distinction of rank was made between them. But the central act of atonement on the Day could be accomplished by one priest alone, that is by him who was recognized as the high priest. There are reasons for believing that both the ritual of the Day and the unique standing of the high priest were

products of the religious life of Israel after the Exile, but our author took the text and the ritual as they existed in his own age. These were the forms familiar to his readers from Scripture, and it was, therefore, with them that he was concerned.

Jesus, then, is the great High Priest. But at once a difficulty arises. Not only the high priest, but every other priest, must be a descendant of Aaron and a member of the tribe of Levi, according to the theory accepted in the writer's time. But Jesus did not fulfil this condition, and it was, therefore, desirable to show that the restriction did not necessarily apply, and that there might be, and was, a priesthood superior to that of Aaron and of his sons. For this purpose the writer introduces references to Melchizedek, a priest contemporary with Abraham and therefore older than either Levi or Aaron. It is to this older and superior order that Jesus belongs, and, in virtue of this position, it can be claimed that He stands far above all human priesthood.

As we have a great high priest, then, who has passed through 14
the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our
confession ; for ours is no high priest who is incapable of 15
sympathising with our weaknesses, but one who has been
tempted in every respect like ourselves, yet without sinning.
So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, that 16
we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in the
hour of need.

We have already[1] had a hint of the writer's conviction that Jesus is to be regarded as the great High Priest, and the new aspect of the question is introduced by a kind of general appeal based on the author's view of the subject. As we observe so often in this book, one of his chief aims is to strengthen the faith and confirm the loyalty of believing Christians. In so doing he gives utterance to one of the great sentences of the Epistle—indeed of the New Testament. He has already emphasized the greatness of Jesus, and once more,

[1] ii. 17.

in a single phrase, calls attention to His unique qualifications for the High-priesthood. He **has passed through the heavens,** and so knows God, not merely as man may know Him, but as one who has lived the very life of the Father, and dwells naturally in His sphere. While our author lays the utmost stress—especially in these three verses—on the human aspect of Jesus as qualifying Him for the work of reconciliation, he never allows himself or his readers to lose sight of the other side. It is because Jesus, and Jesus alone, combines the two, that He is able to accomplish what He does accomplish, and stand between man and God, making atonement for sin.

With this reminder we pass on to the other, the earthly, aspect of our Lord. We have already noted that the essential doctrine of the writer is one which we may call Atonement by Sympathy, and so strongly does this possess his mind that he cannot keep it below the surface. It has little bearing on the apologetic and dialectic purpose of the Epistle, and yet it constantly rises to expression. Nowhere is it more clearly formulated than here. The best and greatest of mere men is limited in his experience. He has lived his own life, and the things through which he has passed belong to him alone and confine him to their sphere. None of us is a complete man ; there are aspects of human feeling of which each of us is incapable. Our imagination, too, is restricted, and with the best will in the world we find it difficult to share in the sorrows and trials even of those whom we love best. So it comes to pass that we cannot **sympathize** fully with our brethren, for every one of them has a weakness somewhere which does not apply to us, just as we have failings and difficulties which no other human spirit can fully share. In all the long story of the race, there has been but One who

> . . . every grief hath known
> That wrings the human breast,

and He alone, therefore, is fully competent to become the High Priest who can mediate between God and man.

Jesus, then, **has been tempted in every respect like ourselves.** The language deserves some consideration. Quite literally it

runs ' tempted in all things according to [His] likeness [with us].' This surely means that He was tempted on every side of human nature. It may be argued that much of our temptation is the direct result of our own sin—that, for instance, one who has committed an offence may seek to escape the consequences by falsehood. But, on the other hand, it is also true that none of us has ever felt the full force of temptation. The powers of evil have never had to exert their full strength upon us ; we have always surrendered before the limit was reached. Not so with Jesus ; His whole life was one of temptation, and the very fact that He had powers and abilities which the rest of us do not possess only added to the stress. His was the fullest and most vivid personality that this world has ever known, and the very richness of His human nature exposed Him all the more fully to the assaults of temptation. He was tempted **in every respect,** on every side of man's complex being, and exposed to every peril of the soul. For He was **like ourselves**—exactly like us in His physical and spiritual constitution. He looked on life as we do, more especially as the men of His day did. The writer's language forbids us to believe that he ascribed to Jesus any superhuman knowledge of the world in which He lived. As far as His actual consciousness went, He must have shared the beliefs and opinions of the men about Him. It was only in His knowledge of God, in His intimacy with His Father, that He surpassed all others, and even there we get the impression that our author would have allowed the theoretical possibility (a possibility never actually achieved in experience) that others might attain to the same knowledge, could they but resist the force of temptation as Jesus did.

It is just there, however, that the difference between Jesus and the rest of us reveals itself. He was **tempted**—more seriously tested than any other ever has been—**yet without sinning.** May it not be that here, too, Jesus was exhibiting a perfect humanity ? Had he been faced with the direct question, we may be sure that the writer would have maintained that sin was not natural to man, that it was no essential element in human nature. He would have said that we were

made with the capacity to go wrong, or there could have been no capacity to go right, but he would strenuously have denied that evil was necessarily imposed on us by our physical and spiritual constitution. We know, as a fact of experience, that we have all sinned, but in each individual instance of failure there has been the possibility of success. No one of us can point to any of the countless acts of sin with which our record is stained and say, 'I could not help it; I was bound to do the wicked thing at that moment.' For Jesus, **tempted in every respect like ourselves,** has resisted to the uttermost, and has thereby shown us the way in which we also may end the conflict with victory.

Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner, that is the secret of the Atonement as our author views it. Hovering round the back of his mind, never rising to conscious expression, though in the last resort fundamental to his teaching, is the thought that the experience of Jesus is the experience of God. As St. Paul put it, **in Christ God reconciled the world unto Himself,**[1] and we cannot separate the two from one another. Hence the entry of Jesus into our world, in theological language, the 'Incarnation,' means the sympathy of God in Christ. We may feel that this is an element in the divine life as eternal as God Himself, and that we cannot limit Him and condition His forgiveness by a definite event in history. Yet, bounded as we are by the categories of time and space, we can fully appreciate the meaning of God only when He manifests Himself under those categories; the life and death of Jesus are, as it were, the eternal heart of God thrown for an instant on the screen of this world. Thus interpreted, they tell us of a God-made reconciliation, attained in the only way in which it could be achieved. Where there has been a breach between two persons, however much they may differ in character and in magnitude, restoration is possible only through the forgiveness accorded to the wrongdoer by the injured party. And forgiveness can never be a light or an easy thing. The greatest of all possible injuries is that inflicted on love. We may, in fact, almost go so far as to say that there is no other really

[1] 2 Cor. v. 19.

deep wrong that one person can do to another. It is in the rejection or in the disregard of the divine love and its claims that human sin finds its meaning and its horror, and it is here that the gulf is cleft. We know something of the problem of forgiveness in our relations with one another, and we know how difficult it is to accomplish. For the complete restoration of the right relations between the two parties only extreme measures will avail. Forgetfulness is impossible ; there is a wound on the soul of the sufferer which will not cease from its insistent pain. It is not enough to try to disregard it, to crush it below the level of consciousness, for, even if the attempt be successful, it will continue to exist and to ferment beneath the surface, till it may explode in some frightful outburst of unexpected rage. The only possible method is for the injured party to share in the experience of the wrongdoer, passing through all the temptation which led to the wrong, understanding the peculiar psychology (and the psychology of every individual is in some way peculiar) which made this particular form of injury possible, and appreciating, not only the remorse which the guilty party actually feels, but that which he would feel if he knew all the pain that he has inflicted on a loving heart. In other words, he must bear the sin himself : that is the law of human forgiveness.

Could we have pressed him, we may be sure that our author would have said that the same law holds good also, *mutatis mutandis*, of the divine forgiveness. The pain is infinitely keener, as the heart of God is infinitely greater than the soul of man, but even God can forgive only by bearing the sin of His children. His atonement is possible because He understands all human experience, and has shown us in Jesus that He is not incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but does, in a very deep and real sense, undergo all that the sinner undergoes. It may be urged that Jesus, the sinless, could not have entered into the state of those who have wronged God, yet, if we read the story of the Crucifixion, we shall not fail to realize that in that last desperate moment, when God vanished from the field of experience, Jesus knew that sense of separation which we all know as the result of sin, and knew it with

a bitterness which can be measured only by the reality of His unbroken sense of communion with an infinitely loving Father. To use a modern psychological term, the Cross is, in a very real sense, God's ' expression ' of sin.

We have thus the knowledge of God's perfect understanding of us, even at our worst, and so of His perfect sympathy with us :

> There is no place where earth's sorrows
> Are more felt than up in heaven ;
> There is no place where earth's failings
> Have such kindly judgement given.

We can, therefore, **approach the throne of grace with confidence.** The last word is significant, since it brings out one aspect of the value of the complete humanity of Jesus. In the presence of God there need be no inhibitions. We can afford to be exactly what we are, and need have no fear that we shall be misinterpreted. Jesus knows so completely the conditions of our life, and the constitution of our spirits, that any concealment or ' posing ' in His presence is at once unnecessary and futile. Before men, we feel that there are secrets of the soul which we would not have them scrutinize. We can never, in spite of the utmost frankness, dare to be ourselves, without regard to the opinion which will be formed of us and the impression we shall produce. But it is no use to try to hide anything from One who knows us better than we know ourselves. Other men would fail to understand our point of view, or the position we take up ; God, through Jesus, knows us so fully that we dare to say exactly what is in our minds, certain that there will be no misunderstanding.

In the presence of God, further, there will be an ample supply of that which man requires, that for whose sake he has sought to **approach the throne of grace.** There are two things that the suppliant will especially desire. The one is the assurance of pardon for sins already committed, the certainty that **mercy** will be offered to him. That he may have, for he need not be deterred or hampered by the thought that there is still some barrier standing between himself and God. The other is the knowledge that he can get for his future

defence against the enemy who threatens him some special gift which God alone can bestow, a ' favour ' to which, indeed, he has no claim. This, man may be sure, will be conferred on him exactly at the moment when it is essential, for with the temptation will come also the strength to resist it. We shall **find grace to help us in the hour of need.**

Once more, then, the appeal to fidelity is uttered, for these gifts, in the writer's view, can be secured only by those who **hold fast to** their **confession.** It is clear from the context that there is no thought here of a demand for absolute sinlessness from the believer. We may come to God with a sense of sin upon our conscience, and, indeed, that may be one of the very reasons which drive us to Him. Otherwise there would be no point in the mention of **mercy,** for **mercy** is required only by the penitent sinner. But there are, as it were, grades of sinfulness, and we may fail terribly without falling into the last fatal error, that of apostasy. Again we observe how the writer was in some fear lest his readers should be induced, either by threats or by promises, to desert their faith altogether. That would be the unpardonable sin, from which there would be no hope of a restoration. We must bear this in mind when we come to think of passages later in the book, which seem to impose too harsh a penalty on human sin.

v.

Every high priest who is selected from men and appointed to 1
act on behalf of men in things divine, offering gifts and
sacrifices for sins, can deal gently with those who err 2
through ignorance, since he himself is beset with weakness
—which obliges him to present offerings for his own sins 3
as well as for those of the People. Also, it is an office 4
which no one elects to take for himself ; he is called to
it by God, just as Aaron was. Similarly Christ was not 5
raised to the glory of the high priesthood by Himself but
by Him who declared to Him,

Thou art My son,
to-day have I become Thy father.

Just as elsewhere He says, 6

Thou art a priest for ever, with the rank of Melchizedek.

7 **In the days of His flesh, with bitter cries and tears, He offered prayers and supplications to Him who was able to save Him from death ; and He was heard, because of**
8 **His godly fear. Thus, Son though He was, He learned by**
9 **all He suffered how to obey, and by being thus perfected He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey**
10 **Him, being designated by God high priest** *with the rank of Melchizedek.*

The most important part of the argument contained in this book is that which relates to the high priest. The author, therefore, examines the whole position with far more care and thoroughness than he has devoted to other points in his reasoning, and begins with a study of the qualifications which the high priest needs for the due performance of his duties. These are, of course, conditioned by the supreme function of mediation on the Day of Atonement. Here he has to stand between a holy God and a sinful nation, and to represent each to the other. As he faces God he carries the whole people with him, bearing, in a sense, their burden of spiritual impurity, making due confession, and performing that ritual which, if carried through in accordance with the expressed will of God, will secure the restoration of His favour. For success in this undertaking it is obviously of supreme importance that the high priest himself should be *persona grata* with God.

Even with the growing knowledge of God which came to the Jewish people in the course of divine revelation, there was much that was not understood. Men felt, as they always must feel, that there was a mystery about Him. Their inspired teachers had, in long succession, made ever clearer the picture of His character and requirements, but there was still a possibility that His will was so imperfectly known that if men sought to satisfy Him on their own initiative, they might fall into fatal error. It is only in Jesus that the world has seen God with such clearness as to feel *sure*, at least of the main lines on which His will may be followed. *A fortiori*, if it was dangerous for men to appoint their own representative in matters religious, it was still more perilous for an individual

man to appoint himself. Such presumption could only bring down disaster on the sinner, and would entirely nullify any efforts he might make to secure atonement for his people. In order that the priest and the people might be safe, the choice of the mediator must be left to God, who would certainly select the right man. This is what actually happened in the history of Israel as the writer read it; God **called Aaron,** and, in him, all his descendants, to perform the functions of the priesthood. Men might not see or understand the reasons for this choice, and the Scripture contained at least one story of a protest against it.[1] The will of God was inscrutable, but it was beyond challenge or dispute, and it must be carried out in its entirety. A general principle is expressed here, with the historic instance as an illustration—the high-priesthood **is an office which no one elects to take for himself; he is called to it by God, just as Aaron was.**

The Godward aspect of the high priest's office thus demanded a divine appointment. In the other direction, that of man, there were also essential qualifications, springing out of the nature of the office. A high priest must have a certain sympathy with those whom he represented. It was his part to express the penitence of the people, and this would have been impossible if he had not himself understood the meaning of sin so far as to make the repentance his own. This was an essential element in the ritual of the Day, for as the priest laid his hands upon the head of the scapegoat, he said: 'O Lord, Thy people, the house of Israel, hath committed iniquity, transgressed and sinned in Thy sight. O Lord, pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquities, transgressions, and sins which Thy people, the house of Israel, hath committed in Thy sight.'[2] No one who was completely ignorant of the meaning of sin could have said this in the right spirit. A perfectly pure and righteous man (could such a being have been found) might well have been revolted by the thought of sin, and have refused to plead for his people in his anger. The effective

[1] In the rebellion of Korah; cp. Num. xvi.

[2] For the legal prescription see Lev. xvi. 21, and for the actual formula employed see Mishnah tractate *Yoma*, vi. 2.

priest must be able to **deal gently with those who err through ignorance,** and, however good he himself might be, he must moderate the emotional repulsion which foulness excites in purity. The danger is, however, purely theoretical, since a high priest **is selected from men,** and is, therefore, himself a sinner **who is beset with weakness—which obliges him to present offerings for his own sins as well as for those of the people.** Thus one of the first acts in the ritual of the day was the offering of a bull by the priest, 'to make an atonement for himself, and for his house.'[1] The ritual actually practised in the last century of the second Temple involved a double confession of sin on the part of the officiating priest. When he first emerged in his holy robes to begin the ceremonial of the Day, after the ritual washing (during which a sheet was hung between the priest and the people, to hide him from their gaze), he approached a bull which had been made ready for him between the porch and the altar, laid his two hands upon it, and said, 'O Lord, I and my house have committed iniquity, transgressed, and sinned in Thy sight. O Lord, pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquities, the transgressions, and the sins, which I and my house have committed in Thy sight.' Then the people behind him (he was facing the Temple door) responded, 'Blessed be His glorious, kingly name for ever and ever.'[2] Lots were next cast upon the two goats, the one for the actual sacrifice and the other for the scapegoat, and then the priest approached a second bull, over which he made confession in the same form as he had done over the first, save that he introduced the whole family of Aaron, in addition to himself and his house.[3] There was, thus, no doubt as to his sinful character, nor as to his own personal need and the need of his colleagues for divine forgiveness. There was, and could be, no fear that he would fail to appreciate the **weakness** of those on whose behalf he ministered, for his own frailty was especially emphasized in the actual ritual by this twofold confession. He was reminded that he had abundant reason to share in the repentance and remorse of Israel as they sought to attain pardon for their sin.

[1] Lev. xvi. 11. [2] *Yoma*, iii. 8. [3] *Yoma*, iv. 2.

Here, then, are the two outstanding qualifications required of the high priest, and the writer proceeds to show how Jesus fulfils them. As usual, he supports his contention by an appeal to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, citing in the first instance a passage which he has already quoted, though his stress is now laid on different elements in it. This is Ps. ii. 7, which has appeared already in i. 5, and was evidently the subject of much thought on the author's part. On the former occasion, however, it had been used to emphasize the fact of the Sonship of Jesus ; now its function is to illustrate a particular feature of that Sonship.

Officially the Christian Church holds, and has held from a very early period, the doctrine that the Son is co-eternal with the Father, and has repudiated the conception that Jesus came into the world as a mere man, being raised to the divine dignity after His birth. But we must remember that it took the Church several generations to formulate its own views, and that its theology is not so much a statement of eternal and ultimate truth (which, in the nature of the case, can never be expressed in finite human language), as a description and interpretation of its own experience of God and Christ, as far as possible harmonized with itself and with an idealistic metaphysic. It must not, therefore, surprise us if we meet with expressions, and even with opinions, in the writers of the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic ages, which we find it difficult to fit in with the statements which ultimately gained currency in orthodox Christianity. If this clause stood alone, it would be possible to argue, with all plausibility, that the words **'to-day I have become Thy Father,'** as applied by this writer, necessarily imply, either that there was a time when the Son did not exist, or that He was a simple man, 'adopted' by God for His purpose of redemption. Indeed, this particular phrase looks like a formula of adoption, and we must leave open the possibility that the writer so regarded it. Once more we have unmistakable evidence of the fact that the author was unaware of the teaching of the Fourth Gospel, for otherwise he could not have ignored the doctrine that **the Logos existed in the very beginning, the Logos was with God, the Logos was**

divine.[1] His failure to make any reference to this view is the more significant, inasmuch as he shares with the writer of the Fourth Gospel the opinion that Jesus was the agent of creation.

We cannot, however, argue further as to the exact theory held by our writer. The appearance of 'adoptionism' is directly counteracted by the doctrine last mentioned, i.e. that the universe was made through a necessarily pre-existent Christ.[2] We must not, then, lay too much stress on the quotation which the author uses to support the view he seeks to emphasize in this passage. We have had reason to notice already the fact that, to a modern mind, his use of Scripture is lax and unreliable. The reason is to be found in the theory that every important statement he makes must be founded on some text from the Old Testament, and, inasmuch as a good deal of what he had to tell the world was really foreign to Jewish and Old Testament doctrine, it follows that he was often compelled to put a forced meaning on some of his proof texts and to ignore the implications of others. In this quotation from Ps. ii., all that he is concerned to show is that Jesus held the divine commission, that, just like Aaron and his successors, He held office, not by the will of man, still less of His own choice, but through the purpose and design of God. In that way He can be shown to fulfil one of the essential conditions of the high-priesthood, and to satisfy one of its most urgent demands.

The second quotation, taken from Ps. cx. 4, carries the argument a stage further. Had the author been strict with himself, and insisted that Jesus must be all that the official high priest was, it would have been necessary to show that He was of the house of Aaron. Clearly, however, it was well known in the Church that Christ was not a member of the official priestly family, or even of the tribe of Levi. Indeed, in vii. 14, our author distinctly assigns Jesus to the tribe of Judah. We have no means of knowing whether any one of our Gospels in its present form was in the hands of the writer, though it seems probable that he was ignorant even of the Gospel according to St. Mark. But it is clear, not only from the

[1] John i. 1. [2] i. 2.

argument used in this passage, but also from other references, that a tradition had already grown up, and was circulated in the Church, as to certain historical facts about the life of Jesus. We may suspect that there were already in existence documents which contained summaries of events, and it has been shown that, by the time our earliest extant Gospel appeared, a traditional outline or framework of His story was widely recognized—possibly more than one. The writer of this Epistle makes no appeal to a book of any kind, but he was keenly interested (from the nature of his view) in the earthly experiences of Jesus, and he was able to assume that his readers were familiar with a good deal that had happened. It is significant that most of the references to historical events are concerned with the Passion, a circumstance which is not wholly to be explained by the prominent place that the death of Jesus held in the writer's theology. It surely suggests also that the closing week of the life of Jesus was the period which was best known in the Church, and we may conjecture that this was the part of the Gospel narrative which was the earliest to reach a written form. As known to our author and to his readers, it may have been prefaced by a brief summary which gave the outstanding facts on which all forms of Christian tradition were agreed.

One of the necessary qualifications, then, for the priesthood was fulfilled by Jesus—He was **not raised to the glory of the priesthood by Himself, but by** God. It remained to emphasize the second qualification, that of practical human experience —an aspect of Jesus which impressed the writer almost more than any other. Here he cannot, in the nature of the case, prove his position by reference to the Old Testament, but it is clear that he had at his disposal some body of Christian tradition such as that which has already been suggested. It is also obvious that this was so widely known and so generally accepted as to have become authoritative ; the writer appeals to it in a way which shows that he had no suspicion that his facts might be disputed.

Whatever may be our view (or the writer's) as to the pre-existence and divine origin of the Son, and however high the

place we assign to Him, it is obvious that there is one thing which He could acquire only **in the days of His flesh,** and that is a first-hand knowledge of the experience of suffering. The point which has already been made in ii. 10 is re-introduced, and is viewed from a new angle. It is true that Jesus could not have been a perfect Author of **salvation** unless He had suffered, but it is also true that He could not have exhibited a perfect human character unless He had **learned by suffering.** The phrasing might suggest an actual imperfection, fault, or inclination to disobedience in Jesus. The words found here might have been used of a man who had insisted on pursuing his wilful course, regardless of the expressed will of God, until his evil ways brought him into such disaster that he recognized at length that he must obey if he would avoid pain. But, here, as in some other passages, we have to admit that the superficial interpretation of the writer's words is contradicted by the whole of his essential theory. He could not think of Jesus as being at any time wilful or rebellious ; to him it was of the essence of His character that He was **tempted in every respect like ourselves, yet without sinning.** It cannot, then, be literally true that Jesus **learned by all** that **He suffered how to obey,** for He needed no special lesson to teach Him that He must submissively co-operate in doing the will of God. Nor is it enough to point out that, in the Greek phrase represented by '**he learned by all** that **he suffered,**' we have a familiar saying of the ethical philosophers, whose form commended itself because of the verbal assonance ('*emathen . . . epathen*'), and to assume that the author was simply trying to adapt to Christian purposes a commonplace of the Schools of the day. The key to the whole phrase lies in the word 'obedience.' This might, it is true, be rendered and interpreted as meaning **how to obey,** but the translation fails to bring out the fundamental thought of the writer. Jesus **learned** obedience, not in the sense of finding out the method by which that end was to be achieved, but in appreciating from practical experience what its full meaning was. Obedience is easy when it and its results are pleasant, but the man who has been tested no further than this knows comparatively

little about it. It is only when obedience becomes difficult, painful, even disastrous, that we really discover its meaning. We must know what it costs, we must go with it down into the depths, before we can say that we really understand it. Jesus, on the theory of this writer, did not need to learn that He must obey, or how to obey; what He did need was the practical knowledge, only to be gained from actual experience, of what obedience implied. This even He could attain only by going to the extreme of suffering in fulfilment of His Father's will. Jesus knew all about obedience, because He knew all about the suffering that may be entailed in its exercise.

Here the paradox of Christian doctrine finds its solution. All men are sons of God, and, though Jesus is the **Son** in a special sense, yet He **had to resemble His brothers in every respect, in order to prove a merciful and faithful high priest in things divine, to expiate the sins of the People.**[1] The ideal son is always obedient, and can exhibit obedience in its fulness only when it involves the most fearful suffering that can be known. Human obedience to the will of God necessarily means pain, and Jesus has shown to the world that He knows what that pain means in its most terrible form. Hence He is **perfected**—a term whose significance we have already discussed in thinking of ii. 10—and has fulfilled the demand which His office imposed on Him, that of knowing all man's life from the inside. He can now, in virtue of His perfect knowledge both of God and of man, assume a position of authority, and direct men along the Godward path. We shall **obey** God when we **obey Him,** for the conditions of our **salvation** require that we should play our little part.

By the suffering imposed through His obedience, then, Jesus **became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.** The point selected by the writer to illustrate the intensity of what Jesus endured seems to be Gethsemane. The records as they have come down to us testify that there, as nowhere else, **with bitter cries and tears, He offered prayers and supplications to Him who was able to save Him from death.** It is true that the extant Gospels make no mention of tears in

[1] ii. 17.

the garden, yet we can hardly fail to see a reference to the thrice-uttered petition, '**Take this cup from Me,**'[1] combined with the obvious indications of supreme agony offered by the Gospel narrative. It would appear that the writer was familiar with a story of the Passion which differed in details from those which have come down to us, not, indeed, contradicting, but supplementing them. We have no reason, however, to doubt the historicity of the tears ; on the contrary, it is difficult to picture the scene without them, and we may have full confidence in the accuracy of the tradition preserved by this writer.

There, in Gethsemane, lay the real conflict, and the physical agony of the Cross itself is comparatively insignificant beside what Jesus endured in facing it. There never has been any man who has suffered more than this. Yet Jesus maintained His spirit of filial obedience, **His godly fear,** and, in spite of all it cost Him, He concluded His prayer with the words, '**not what I will but what Thou wilt.**'[2] God Himself could impose no more searching test, and in the garden there was achieved the greatest victory ever won on earth for Him.

It is significant that the author adds another detail, which may be an interpretation of the statement made in Luke xxii. 43,[3] that **an angel from heaven appeared to strengthen Him.** If that form of the tradition was in the hands of our author, then he has paraphrased it into the simpler statement that Jesus **was heard.** The phrase raises interesting trains of thought on what we commonly call 'answers to prayer.' When the Old Testament psalmist spoke of God hearing him, he meant that his request was granted. A similar meaning is usually attached to the modern phrase just mentioned. But Jesus was certainly not **heard** in this sense, nor did He obtain the 'answer' to His prayer. The Cup did not pass from Him ; God, though **able,** was not willing **to save Him from death.** Clearly the writer of Hebrews would not have shared either the ancient or the modern conception of hearing and answering prayer. It did not follow that because the Father **heard**

[1] Mark xiv. 36. [2] Mark xiv. 36.

[3] Verses 43 f. are omitted by many ancient authorities, but, though they have the air of being a later addition, the weight of attestation seems to be in favour of retaining them.

the request of His Son that He would therefore grant it, nor can we assume that God has no answer to give us except to accede to our wishes. If we remember what prayer was to Jesus—and what it should be to us—we shall realize that it was the sense of communion with the Father, the free opening of both hearts to one another, the loving fellowship of kindred spirits, unaffected and unrestrained by any fear or misunderstanding. The divine vocabulary is not confined to the single word ' Yes ! ' and the shake of the head, as well as the nod, indicates attention to a speaker. Men often ask, especially in moments of distress, ' Does God hear and answer prayer ? ' and the answer to the question is commonly held to be dependent on the ' success ' or otherwise of the petition. Our author would have held this to be a complete misunderstanding of the conditions of prayer, and he would have quoted the supreme instance of an agonized pleading which failed to win its object. Yet, even there, he insisted that the prayer was heard, and that, though the request was refused, the bond of friendship between Father and Son remained unimpaired.

On this point I have a great deal to say, which it is hard to 11
make intelligible to you. For you have grown dull of
hearing. Though by this time you should be teaching 12
other people, you still need someone to teach you once
more the rudimentary principles of the divine revelation.
You are in need of milk, not of solid food. (For any one 13
who is fed on milk is unskilled in moral truth ; he is a
mere babe. Whereas solid food is for the mature, for 14
those who have their faculties trained by exercise to
distinguish good and evil.) vi.
Let us pass on then to what is mature, leaving elementary 1
Christian doctrine behind, instead of laying the foundation
over again with repentance from dead works, with faith
in God, with instruction about ablutions and the laying 2
on of hands, about the resurrection of the dead and eternal
punishment. With God's permission, we will take this 3
step.*

* Reading ποιήσομεν with ℵ B, the Latin version, etc., instead of ποιήσωμεν.

The last paragraph closed with a reference to Melchizedek, to whose priestly **rank** the author ascribes Jesus, in order to escape the demand that the high priest should be of the family of Aaron. This, he feels, needs extended exposition, and he will presently proceed to a detailed statement of his position. But the prospect awakens a doubt in his mind, and he pauses in order to tell his readers what that doubt is. So we have a digression, leading on to a second in ch. vi., before the theme proper is renewed in ch. vii.

The question in the writer's mind is due to the difficulty of the subject on which he is now embarking. He realizes that his argument must be closely followed, and that it may require an especially trained mind to appreciate it. He does not believe that his immediate readers have the necessary qualifications to understand something which **it is hard to make intelligible.** This is not because they were naturally stupid, for their capacities were originally great enough, if properly trained. But they **have grown dull of hearing.** They have become intellectually sluggish, and have been satisfied to hear the same truths repeated again and again, in such fashion as to make no demands on their thinking powers. Their faculties are in serious danger of being atrophied ; they are like a child who has never learnt to use its limbs and to develop its latent powers. This is not the true Christian life. Men do not learn about God merely for the sake of acquiring knowledge—making a collection of facts. If that were all, they would be free to stop where they pleased, and to amass as little of Christian doctrine as would ensure them safe conduct into heaven. But more is required of those who have learned Christ, especially of those who have long been inside the Christian Church. They **should be teaching other people,** and should to that end go further in the knowledge of God. They have responsibilities to others as well as privileges for themselves, and for the fulfilment of those responsibilities they must throw off the intellectual sloth which enfolds them, and be prepared to advance further in the Christian doctrine.

The metaphor here used is a familiar one, that of the infant as he grows to maturity. His early nutriment is **milk** alone,

but as he grows older he gradually passes to **solid food,** which is proper for **the mature.** The infant **is unskilled in moral truth,** or, perhaps, is rather to be described as unskilled in ethical reasoning. That is where the writer's readers are. It is not impossible that the Epistle is a reply to a request from some group of Christians for instruction or exposition of truth, and that, in stating their case, they had said that they needed **someone to teach** them **once more the rudimentary principles of the divine revelation.** Whether this were so or not, it is clear that the author had some means of information as to their condition, and that he was far from satisfied with it. Though they had so long been Christians that they ought to have learned enough to become teachers, yet their actual requirement was that they should revise the elements of religious knowledge. They wanted the **rudiments,** the A B C of the faith, once again, and were in the position of students who, having learned the elementary grammar of a language, wanted to go back and start the alphabet once more, instead of launching out into further study. The special field of their enquiry was **divine revelation,** though, in view of the author's methods, and of the subject which has immediately provoked this digression, it is not impossible that the **revelation** contemplated is that contained in the Old Testament. The word used means literally 'oracles,' and occurs elsewhere in the New Testament as a designation of the Old.[1] Since the author proposes to demonstrate from the Old Testament that Jesus is the legitimate High Priest **with the rank of Melchizedek,** it may well be that this was the sense of the word uppermost in his mind when he chose it.

No generation of Christians can afford to neglect the warning contained in these verses. It is true that we must be born again, and that we must become as little children, but there would be something very seriously wrong with an infant that remained an infant, or with a child that did not grow up. It is quite right and proper that we should love to hear the 'old, old story,' and we may rightly insist that it must never in any circumstances be forgotten or overlooked. But it loses no

[1] Cp. Rom. iii. 2.

small part of its value if it is made the end of the Christian life, as well as its beginning, and is held to be a substitute for genuine growth. It is also true that Christianity is something very much greater than Christian doctrine, and that theology can never take the place of faith. But there are very grave dangers in refusing to allow for the development of the intellectual powers, whether in the individual or in the Church. A true Christian life is one which so develops

> That mind and soul, according well,
> May make one music, as before,
> But vaster.

Doubtful as he is about the capacity of his readers for further advance, the writer is yet determined to make the attempt, and to lead them, if he can, along paths which they have not hitherto trodden. After all, the limbs of the spirit can gain strength only by exercise, and the undeveloped Christian can grow only by having set before him problems which will tax his powers. Through such activities of mind and soul he can **pass on to what is mature,** in the sense that he can make progress towards adult stature. Very courteously and tactfully the writer tacitly admits that he, like his readers, needs to grow, and makes it clear that his desire is to take them with him in his exploration of the ground which no man yet has traversed. ' Let *us,*' he says, ' discuss no more the beginning of Christ—what Christ does in the early days of His association with one of His followers—what a young Christian must of necessity learn about his Master. We ought now to be **leaving elementary Christian doctrine behind,** and to progress to the greater heights of reason and of faith.'

So the writer warns his readers against the futile toil of **laying the foundation over again.** No progress can be made in any branch of life unless men are prepared to accept the validity of their experience, and to assume the stability of their original position. We are dependent in our religious life on much the same methods as those which we employ in natural science, observing facts, both our own experiences and those of others in the present and in the past, and on the basis

of these facts building up a hypothesis. In one of its aspects, faith is the acceptance of such a hypothesis, and the determined consecration to a life lived on the assumption of its validity. Just as so simple and obvious a natural law as that which we call gravitation is a deduction from a very large number of observed instances (though the deduction is seldom consciously made), so the Christian's belief in the salvation offered through Jesus is the result, partly of his own experience, partly of what he has been told by others, and partly of his reasoning on the facts thus brought before him. As in the case of natural law, the process is not often a deliberate one, but it is none the less real. We can obviously make no progress in all those scientific studies which depend, may we say, on the law of gravitation, if we constantly review the events which have led us to posit the law, repeatedly test its validity, and refuse to proceed further. It is equally futile to insist on a repetition of the fundamentals of the spiritual life, when we have once been so assured of them that we can make them the groundwork for higher developments. The refusal to accept them and to build upon them is the direct opposite of faith, for it means that we do not really hold the spiritual hypothesis on which faith can be exercised.

It cannot be urged that, in a life built up on the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, there is real danger that these should be forgotten or obscured. If an astronomer proceeds to discuss the movements, position, and mass of the heavenly bodies, using advanced mathematics for his purpose, no one accuses him of forgetting either the basic law of gravitation or the elementary arithmetical processes. Just as little can a man who advances beyond the initial stages, and seeks to make valid progress in Christian thought and experience, justly be charged with neglect of the great essential verities of the Christian revelation.

In this spirit, and in language suited to his age, our author seeks to lead his readers somewhat further than they have yet ventured to go. His list of the elementary doctrines is of great interest to us, since it suggests that, even before the end of the first century A.D., there were certain truths which

were regularly put before enquirers and young Christians, forming an outline of teaching, already becoming traditional, offered to catechumens. Quite clearly there would have been no purpose in the mention of these particular points, unless they were familiar, both to writer and to readers, as forming the A B C of Christian doctrine.

The points in question are arranged in pairs. The first two are concerned with the beginning of the Christian life, and show that it has a double aspect. It involves both a break with the old life and the entry on a new type of existence. The former aspect is expressed in the words **repentance from dead works. Repentance** is characteristic of all Christian teaching. It is said to have been the keynote of the preaching even of John the Baptist, and the evangelists attest it as the essence of the early message of Jesus Himself.[1] It is a significant term, because it suggests something in which Christianity offers the world a unique doctrine. It is not regret for past sin, nor is it sorrow or even a determination to do better in the future, though it may, in effect, partake of all these. It is a complete change of the inner life, a reversal of the previous aim of a man's deepest being. The world's moralists—Confucian, Buddhist, Stoic, Pharisee, and any others—have all set before man much the same ideal type of conduct, and it will be found that the standard propounded by Jesus does not differ greatly from that which man's ethical sense in general has set up. But others reached their aim by suppression of human nature, thereby often giving opportunity to spiritual dangers such as pride and arrogance, which may be even more harmful to the soul than the more blatant forms of moral wrong. The method of Jesus and of His followers was to take human nature, with all its God-given instincts, and invert the direction in which it points. The process does not differ greatly from that to which recent psychology gives the name of *sublimation*, and it is interesting to observe how the moral philosophers seem at last to have discovered, on a psychological investigation, what has been taught throughout its history by the Christian Church. Men must

[1] Cp., e.g., Mark i. 15.

be 'born again,' make a new start, turn their backs on the old and their faces to the new.

It is, then, not an accident that the appropriate preposition following **repentance** should be **from.** The old life is described as one which consists in **dead works.** The noun is clearly not used in the sense which it sometimes has in St. Paul and in St. James—action as opposed to faith. Even in St. Paul it often has simply the sense of 'deeds,' and may be further defined as in the phrases '**deeds of darkness**,'[1] and '**evildoing**.'[2] The writer quite definitely meant that the pre-Christian life of those to whom he is writing had been marked by wickedness which was in itself dead, and, possibly, might have proved to be death-dealing.

Turning the direction of the soul away from these evil deeds, man must aim at **faith in God. Faith** is one of those words whose content may be so great that it is almost impossible to define them. Jesus, for instance, spoke of **faith** as the antithesis of fear.[3] To St. Paul, amongst other things, it meant a mystical union with Christ.[4] Our writer uses the term normally in a more restricted sense, as being that which gives reality to the unseen, and takes the place of experience as an attestation of the validity of a doctrine. Perhaps, however, if we could have cross-examined him, we should have found that he gave the term a deeper meaning when he used it with a personal object. '**Faith in God**' means more than a belief that the Invisible exists; it implies a personal confidence, and so a personal relation. To repent of a life of sin, to turn away **from dead works,** is but the negative aspect of conversion. It must have also a positive side, to which the other is no more than a necessary preliminary; man must turn towards **God** in **faith.**

In the first pair of doctrines selected, the author sums up the elementary teaching of the Church on the beginning of the Christian life. He then passes on to the sacraments, and selects two of these. It is noteworthy that he makes no mention of the Lord's Supper, which most modern Christians

[1] Rom. xiii. 12. [2] Col. i. 21, where the A.V. has 'wicked works.'
[3] Cp. Mark iv. 40. [4] Cp. Gal. ii. 20 and above, p. 37.

would certainly have chosen as a leading illustration. To many, indeed, this is *the* Sacrament *par excellence*, and they would regard it as the most effective of all the ' outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace.' The omission is the more striking inasmuch as the writer lays all his stress on the death of Jesus, and the Supper is, at the very least, an ever-repeated memorial of the Cross.

We may possibly find the reason for the omission here in the two elements in early ritual which are selected. These are **ablutions, and the laying on of hands.** The reference is undoubtedly to baptism and to another piece of ritual which is more than once closely associated with baptism. Both concern a second stage in the spiritual history of the Christian, the reception of the Holy Spirit. Now, while some of our deepest spiritual experiences are connected with the Supper, it is a rite which may be repeated many times in our lives. Save for the ' first communion ' it does not mark a fresh departure, and, though it may be profoundly important, its significance is not of the same kind as that of the other rites mentioned.

We may assume that there was on these points a certain body of teaching which had become traditional by the time that this Epistle was written. Both rituals were used for a number of different purposes, inside and outside the Christian Church. The practice of ablution, of bathing the whole body, was common as an initiation rite in many types of religion. It formed a part of the regular religious duty of the Jew, who thus kept himself free from impurity which he might have contracted through his intercourse with the heathen. In the Law it was one of the recognized means whereby a person who, for any reason, had become ceremonially unclean might secure readmission into the holy community. It was included among the acts which had to be performed by the proselyte who entered the Jewish Church, and might be one of the admission ceremonies for any sect which claimed peculiar purity or sanctity. With this purpose it seems to have been employed by John the Baptist. It also occurred frequently outside Judaism and Christianity, and we find it, in one form or

another, in those 'mystery-religions' which reached their highest point in the early Christian centuries.

While, then, it was familiar as a piece of ritual, to all the world, it had a peculiar significance for the Christian. To him it was associated with the entry on a new life, a life in Christ. St. Paul, with his mystical conception of the relation between Jesus and His followers, could speak of it as a burial and a resurrection with Jesus.[1] Apparently it was the rite through which the new believer was admitted into the Christian community, and became, strictly, a member of the Church.

More than once the **laying on of hands** is associated with baptism[2] when new converts are mentioned. It was an act, however, which might be used for other purposes as well, and was, it seems, the means whereby a special spiritual gift was handed on from one who possessed it to others. Thus the appointment of an individual to an office needing peculiar qualities was ratified in this way, and, apparently, the necessary powers were not present until they had been thus conferred. We may, however, suppose that the writer of this Epistle had in mind more particularly the use of the rite on entry into the community. For it was the experience of the early Church that it was the medium through which the Holy Spirit was conferred on people who had been baptized.[2] As employed for this purpose, it formed, to judge from the writer's language, the subject of special teaching given to the neophyte, who would learn what to expect, and how this particular application of a familiar rite had its place in the life of every Christian.

The third pair of subjects deals with the life after death, and includes **the resurrection of the dead, and eternal punishment.** A belief in personal survival after death was by no means confined to Jews and Christians. Indeed, it took definite shape among the Greek thinkers long before we find it clearly expressed in Hebrew thought. It was only quite late that it entered into the language of the Jewish Scripture, and we may count on one hand the passages of the Old Testament in which it is unequivocally stated. It was with the growth of

[1] Cp. Rom. vi. 4, Col. ii. 12. [2] Cp. Acts viii. 17, 19, xix. 6.

apocalyptic in the period ' between the Testaments ' that it entered fully into the creed of the orthodox Jew of the Pharisaic party, and by the time of Christ it had become one of the recognized truisms of Judaism. But it tended to take a different form from that which it wore among the Greek thinkers, owing to a difference in psychological theory. To the philosophical mind, man was ' a soul temporarily imprisoned in a body,' and death meant the release of the immortal personality, to live elsewhere. But Hebrew thought naturally conceived of man as ' a body temporarily animated by a soul,' and the only kind of survival possible was a reanimation of the physical being. There would appear to be exceptions to this general rule, both in Greek and in Jewish thought, but the normal views were those just mentioned. Jewish eschatology thus thought primarily of **resurrection,** and the belief of the early Church, inherited from Judaism, was emphasized by the tradition which told of the disappearance of the corpse of Jesus from the tomb, and of His reappearance in recognizable shape. As He had risen, so would His followers rise ; the only difference was that He had already risen, while the restoration of others would be deferred till a later day.

With a doctrine of **resurrection** went a further belief, that of the day of judgement. The word used by our writer does not necessarily mean ' condemnation,' still less ' **punishment,**' but it does imply judgement. Here again we have an inheritance from Jewish eschatology. The earliest form of the doctrine of **resurrection** confined the restoration to a limited number of the faithful. This developed into the view that all men would return to this life, their bodies being reanimated. But, clearly, all could not receive the same treatment, and, by the time of Jesus, orthodox Pharisaic belief had hardened into a doctrine of universal resurrection followed immediately by a great judgement. In that day full account would be taken of all that each man had done and had been, and an award would be made. As to the destination of the ' righteous,' there could be no difference of opinion, but the wicked were sometimes consigned to eternal agony in hell, sometimes destroyed a second

time, and now finally.[1] In any case the judgement was passed, and the young Christian was taught to look forward to the time when all should **appear without disguise before the tribunal of Christ, each to be requited for what he had done with his body, well or ill.**[2]

All these things, however, belong to the 'elements,' and we may have here the earliest and simplest form of a Christian catechism. Ever since the young enquirer first came into contact with the Church and began to ask questions as to its faith and practice, he has been told about them, and as he has grown older they should have become more deeply rooted in his mind. There should, therefore, be no need to dwell on them or to repeat them; rather must they sink below the surface, as the foundations of a building are obscured by the structure erected thereon. The writer will soon enter, with his readers, on a path new even to himself. But, first, there is another digression, and, again one which makes no contribution to the argument.

For in the case of people who have been once enlightened, 4
who tested the heavenly Gift, who participated in the
holy Spirit, who tasted the goodness of God's word and 5
the powers of the world to come, and then fell away—it 6
is impossible to make them repent afresh, since they
crucify the Son of God in their own persons and hold Him
up to obloquy. For *land* which absorbs the rain that 7
often falls on it, and bears *plants* that are useful to those
for whom it is tilled, receives a blessing from God;
whereas, if it *produces thorns and thistles*, it is reprobate 8
and on the verge of being *cursed*—its fate is to be burned.

Here we have a passage which, perhaps more than any other, has tended to make the Church feel that this writer does not represent the true standard of Christian doctrine. From Luther onwards, men have refused to accept the harsh view

[1] Language used elsewhere, e.g. in x. 27 and in xii. 25–29, suggests that the writer might have adopted this last view, if he had been pressed to work out and to formulate an explicit statement of his opinion on the subject.
[2] 2 Cor. v. 10.

here propounded, and have insisted that there must be an error in the author's opinions. He states, as clearly as he can, that there is no possibility of repentance to the apostate, that conversion can take place once only, and that if, after it all, a man repudiates his Master, then there is no hope for him whatever.

He dwells first for a moment on the glory of the Christian experience. It is as a light coming into the dark places of the soul, illuminating not only the recipient himself, but also the whole area of his knowledge, whether it be of man or of God. Men can be **enlightened** once only; after that, if they allow themselves to slip back into the darkness, there is no second dawn of the spirit. From another point of view, salvation is a **heavenly gift,** the word used implying that the donor has been in no way forced to bestow it. There is no obligation lying on God to redeem sinful man, and none can claim as a right the boon of salvation. It is wholly gratuitous, and serves to illustrate the unbounded loving-kindness of God. Further, those whom the writer has in mind have actually **participated in the holy Spirit.** They have known by practical experience the meaning of His presence, and, probably, have exhibited those manifestations which were always associated with the outpouring of the Spirit in the early Church. They **have tasted the goodness of God's word,** in the sense that they have accepted and tested the divine revelation and have found it to be good. It has commended itself to them, not only because of what others have said about it, but because of the value they have found in it for their own souls. They have not only received these gifts from God as helping them to live in this world, but they have had something which can be called a foretaste of **the powers of the world to come.** Here the writer seems to be thinking of the assurance that the Christian has of a continued life with Christ, of a power which can annul death. All other forms of experience are conditioned in one way or another by the physical, but the faith of one who *knows* Christ and has felt His saving **power,** has passed beyond the bounds of this life, and is already linked with the other. In a very real sense, the Beyond is already here for him, and the

passage of death can but bring him fuller illumination in a realm with which he is not wholly unfamiliar.

It seems as though the writer deliberately enumerated these forms of the blessings of salvation, adding them one to another, in order to emphasize the enormity of the offence which he has in view. It is almost inconceivable that anyone who has known the meaning of all these things should let them go. Rather we should expect him to cling to them at all costs, if only for their own sake. Yet the writer had known instances —perhaps too many—and was afraid of others, in which men had abandoned all the wonder and the glory of the love of God and cast it on one side.

We must not assume that the author held that every failure and transgression involved directly the peril of which he speaks. He must have known himself and his fellow-Christians far too well to suppose that, from the day of their baptism onwards, they would live faultless lives. He was well aware of the facts of human weakness and fallibility, and he cannot have held that when men became Christians they ceased to be human. But there is a difference between yielding to a sin which is contrary to the new life, and abandoning that life altogether. What our author feared was that men should cease entirely to be Christians, and should wholly give up what they had known of Christ. The offence is described in strong language ; these sinners **crucify the Son of God in their own persons and hold Him up to obloquy.** In a certain sense it is true that all our sins crucify Jesus. It was our iniquity which killed Him ; our need of redemption from sin brought Him to the cross. The word used for **crucify** gives some colour to the idea that the apostasy which the writer had in view meant a second crucifixion of Christ, and it has been so interpreted. Yet this is by no means necessary, nor is it the most probable meaning of the term. Rather the writer does not dwell on the fact that the first crucifixion was the result of our sin ; that was an act of general redemption, for which no individual could be held responsible. But deliberately to discard the Saviour is another matter, and brings a man under the direct guilt of the death of Jesus.

The offence is still further described as one which implies that the sinner in question has held Jesus **up to obloquy.** One of the characteristics of the early Christians was that they refused to speak any evil word of Christ. Indeed, in days of persecution, the test which was applied to one suspected of Christianity was that he was asked to ' curse Christ,' and his willingness to accede to the command was at once accepted as clearing the accused of all complicity in the crime of being a Christian. One of the best-known instances is the case of Polycarp. When he was placed on his trial, the first demand of the pro-consul was, ' Swear by Caesar's Fortune, recant, say " Away with the godless." ' The martyr's reply was, ' Away with the godless.' This was not wholly satisfactory, and the pro-consul went further : ' Swear, and I will release thee ; revile Christ.' Polycarp answered, ' I have been His servant for eighty-six years, and He has done me no wrong ; and how can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour ? ' This may be taken as typical of the attitude of the early Christians, and it serves to illustrate the enormity of the offence. It is possible that what the writer of this Epistle had in mind was the behaviour of his fellow-Christians in time of trial. It may be that there were those whom he knew who had been charged before the Roman courts with the crime—a capital offence—of being Christians, and, under stress of persecution, had acceded to the demand made upon them. This would explain the horror with which this offence was regarded, and the rigidity of the punishment which the writer believed to be its due. It was, as we can see, essential to the progress, even to the existence, of the Church that men should hold to their faith in spite of all threats and all persecution, and it was the firmness of the great body of Christians in face of death which enabled them, not merely to maintain their position, but, in the end, to win the world. If we feel that the writer takes too harsh a view, we should remember that the matter was vital to the very existence of the Church.

The lesson is emphasized by a metaphor taken from agriculture—not altogether happily, and we should gather that the author was a townsman who knew a farmer's life only

from casual observation. He draws a contrast between two plots of ground. One has a soft and loose surface, and is able to absorb the abundant rain which falls upon it. It responds to the human care and to the divine gift by bearing the crop which its owner designed for it, and so **receives a blessing from God.** The writer does not state the exact nature of the **blessing,** but he does not need to do so ; his point is sufficiently clear without further details.

On the other side lies the ground which has not responded to the benefits conferred upon it by man and God. The privileges it has received are not enumerated again ; it is assumed that both plots have had exactly the same treatment. But this piece of land does not behave as the first has done, and, instead of the useful crop which was expected, it produces only weeds. The type of parable is an old one, and is found as far back as Isaiah,[1] but the conclusion in this passage is somewhat different from that which is found elsewhere. It seems, in fact, to suggest a combination of two separate sets of ideas. There is, in the first place, the burning of the weeds, and of other unnecessary or dangerous products. With this may be compared the language ascribed to Jesus in Matt. xiii. 30[2] and John xv. 6.[3] This is a natural and normal process of agriculture, with which everyone who has tried even to cultivate a small garden is familiar. But the author has transferred this burning from the rubbish to the field itself, and has thereby introduced a totally different operation. Ancient agriculture did not reap its crops in the same way as the modern farmer does. The straw was of little value, and comparatively long stalks were left in the ground after the ears were removed. Indeed, it seems that often the ears alone were gathered, leaving practically the full length of the stems in the field. This was then burnt, fire being set to one point and spreading rapidly over the whole. But this was not done with the intention of harming the field in any way, but rather with the aim of improving it and making it more capable of bearing

[1] Cp. Isa. v. 1–7, where, however, it is a vineyard, and not a cornfield, which is described.
[2] The Parable of the Tares.
[3] The branches which have been pruned away as being fruitless.

a good crop in the future. The effect was in the first instance to preserve and to return to the soil much of the non-volatile matter which had been taken from it by the corn, and it also served to destroy a certain proportion of the organisms which are deleterious to the crops, e.g. the eggs, larvae, or pupae of noxious insects. The burning of the straw did not, therefore, injure, still less destroy, the field itself, and was strongly recommended by ancient writers on agriculture,[3] especially in cases where a thin straw showed that there was too much moisture in the ground or that pests were too prevalent.

The writer had seen the smoke rising from the fields as he passed them, and he knew that fire was commonly used for the destruction of rubbish. He, not unnaturally, connected the two in his mind, and assumed that both types of fire had the same purpose. It will be remembered that the fate of Isaiah's vineyard was differently described; it was to be deprived of all the care and protection which it had received, and was to be allowed to sink back into its primitive wild state. That would be the real destruction of a field as a field, but it was beyond the experience of our author to understand the subject from which he drew his parable. His meaning, none the less, is unmistakable; he believes that for the apostate the doom of final destruction is inevitable and irrevocable. For the man is **reprobate**; he has had a test applied to him and has not attained the minimum standard required. The word is that which would have been used of a candidate who failed in an examination—if the ancient world had conducted examinations on the modern plan! Therefore, in contrast to the good ground, instead of winning a blessing it is **on the verge of being cursed.**

9 **Though I say this, beloved, I feel sure you will take the better**
10 **course that means salvation. God is not unfair; He will not forget what you have done, or the love you have shown for His sake in ministering, as you still do, to the**

[3] Cp., e.g., Vergil, *Georg.* I. 84 f.:

Saepe etiam steriles incendere profuit agros,
Atque levem stipulam crepitantibus urere flammis.

saints. It is my heart's desire that each of you would prove 11
equally keen upon realizing your full hope to the very end,
so that instead of being slack you may imitate those who 12
inherit the promises by their stedfast faith.

The terrible warning given in the last paragraph was a warning and no more. For the writer does not believe that his friends have actually committed the offence which appeals to him as so dangerous. But he has observed their unwillingness to make the effort towards further progress, and he knows that it is impossible to remain stationary in the Christian life. If men will not move forward, they must inevitably slip back, and one of his reasons for wishing them to launch out on untried waters is to protect them, as far as possible, against the danger of backsliding.

In a passage, then, in which the writer's deep and passionate affection for his readers is stamped on every word, he gives expression to his conviction that they **will take the better course that means salvation.** We ought not to stress the details of the phrase **take the better course,** for the words have a wider application, and may imply a better fate, or a better situation. In some directions the expressions used are a little vague, but it is quite clear that the writer believes that, though the danger he has envisaged does exist for his readers—as it does for every Christian—yet it does not immediately threaten them. On the contrary, there is good ground for hoping that they will escape it, and resist the temptations which surround them.

This confidence has a double basis ; it rests in part on the character and record of the people to whom the Epistle is addressed, and in part on the nature of God Himself. These Christians **have shown,** and are still showing, love towards His name. They have displayed this love in the best of all possible ways, by the services they have rendered **to the saints.** We must not forget, in reading our New Testament, that the term **ministering** has a special *nuance.* It suggests personal service, ' waiting on ' other people, attending to their needs, running their errands, living the life of a valet or of a lady's maid.

The best illustration in the New Testament is to be found in the Johannine story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, a practical demonstration of what He meant when He said, '**the Son of man Himself has come not to be served but to serve.**'[1] Here the writer's friends—men whom he loves intensely—have shown that they have the true spirit of Christ among them, and he is sure that this spirit will not fail when they are faced by more searching trials.

His second ground for confidence is his knowledge of God. God cannot be so **unfair** as to **forget what** they **have done.** Divine justice demands a recognition and a reward for their service, and that cannot fail. The idiom employed here may have a Semitic basis, though it seems that the writer himself had no direct acquaintance with any Semitic language. But there is, especially in Hebrew, a peculiar use of the infinitive which suggests an explanation or an amplification of a statement. **God is not unfair,** and He, therefore, will not show unfairness by forgetting . . . that is the implication of the turn of speech here employed. We suspect that the position had not been logically thought out ; if men were guilty of definite apostasy, no amount of faithful service performed in days gone by would have the slightest effect in warding off or in mitigating their punishment. But probably the writer would wish us to understand that the life these men had lived would induce—perhaps even impel—God to offer them His special protection against temptation, or to give them special strength to resist it when it came. There is a real truth of the spiritual life here. The best defence against temptation is to maintain contact with God, and to follow Christ faithfully, in hours when evil seems to be less pressing. There are times when we may lay up a store of defensive power, whose value becomes apparent only in moments of urgent need. And this, the writer believes, is what his friends have done, and, by their steady fulfilment of the principles of Jesus in the past and in the present, they have armed themselves to meet the more bitter conflict which may yet await them.

That, however, does not end the matter ; there still remains

[1] Mark x. 45.

a hope, of which the writer says that it is his **heart's desire.** He employs a very strong term, which implies a passionate longing, and suggests that the fulfilment of the wish is by no means certain. One of the best illustrations of its use is to be found in the Lucan account of the Last Supper, where Jesus says, **' I have longed eagerly to eat this passover with you before I suffer,'**[1] giving utterance to the intense yearning which He felt. It shows how much the author loves his correspondents, and, when he goes on to speak of **each of** them, he makes it clear that he has an intimate acquaintance with those to whom he is writing. He is not merely sending a vague message to a group of people, whom he knows as a group, and not as individuals ; he is familiar with every one of them, and cares for the fate of every one. His attitude is not simply that of a preacher who has a congregation, possibly strange, before him. He is rather the loving pastor, to whom his audience is a collection of individuals whose character and needs he knows. When he prays for them, he prays with understanding of their separate natures, instincts, and needs. But there is one thing which they all alike require, however different they may be from one another in other respects. That is that they should **prove equally keen upon realizing** their **full hope to the very end.** They have shown ' keenness,' zeal, earnestness, in the fulfilment of the demands made on them by the needs of their fellow-Christians, **the saints.** This has been a service rendered directly to Christ Himself. Had the writer been familiar with the Gospel of St. Matthew, he could hardly have refrained from quoting, **' in so far as you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me.'**[2] That is wholly in accord with the spirit and thought which lead him to lay such stress on these acts of service to those in need ; in behaving as they have done, they have exhibited their devotion to Jesus. But that does not end the matter. It is not enough to have shown this eagerness in one direction or at a single time ; they must go yet further, and maintain in other aspects of the Christian life the spirit which has animated them in this. The whole area of their religious life is summed

[1] Luke xxii. 15. [2] Matt. xxv. 40.

up in the **hope** which they cherish, and to this they must cling. There are two sides to the devotion which is required of them, one intensive and the other extensive. When the author uses the word **full**, he has in mind the whole content of that **hope.** It is not enough to be faithful in some things and to neglect others. The demands of Christ affect every sphere of human life, and none can safely be left on one side. But, further, this high standard of living must be maintained as long as life itself shall last. There is always the danger of falling, and many years of faithful service may be wiped out by a single act of apostasy in extreme old age. They must fight the good fight and keep the faith till they have actually finished their course.

In the closing sentence of the paragraph the writer enforces his appeal in a fashion which looks both backward and forward. He repeats a word that he used at the beginning of the long digression (his word for **slack** is the same as that rendered **dull** in verse 11), hinting at the reality of the danger which, though remote, is still a possibility. Then he offers another picture of the ideal which he seeks to set before his friends, and exhorts them to **imitate those who inherit the promises by their stedfast faith.** The theme is to receive fuller treatment in ch. xi., one of the best-known and most magnificent passages in the whole of the Bible. It is the first time that **promises** have been mentioned, except for the almost casual reference in iv. 1, but if we look back over the intervening sections we shall see that the conception runs throughout the writer's thought, especially in the hortatory passages. There are laid up for those who are Christ's a future **rest** and **glory,** and these are assured to them by the very Word of God. They are available for all who are prepared to fulfil the necessary conditions, but it does not follow that all men, or even that all who have once believed, will satisfy the inevitable demands. It is suggested to us that God, it would seem, cannot help Himself, even if He would, but must confer the supreme blessing on those who are really fit to **inherit** it. As we have already seen, this last term is often used in a general sense, meaning simply 'to take

possession of,' and must so be understood here. But possession is granted only on certain conditions, and it must be realized that for God to grant His gifts to those who do not fulfil the conditions would be a denial of His own laws, and so a contradiction of His very nature. We may speak of Omnipotence as being able to do anything, but we must remember that there can be no sound Christian view of Omnipotence which does not recognize that there are necessarily limitations of a kind imposed on a perfectly good God. He cannot violate His own nature ; He must be consistent with Himself, and, if men fail to note that consistency in His actions, it is because they have not understood the essential principles of His Being. So it comes to pass that sin must work its own punishment, that man reaps what he sows, that the only crop he can gather from the seed of wind is the whirlwind. On the other hand, he who maintains unbroken his **faith** with high-hearted courage and patient endurance—for that is what **stedfast** implies—is bound to win the prize reserved for him by God. History contains a long list of men and women who have thus attained, and their example should serve as an inspiration for those who come after them. The subject is not developed here, but it is not forgotten, and will be adequately dealt with when the main argument of the dialectic portion of the book has been worked out.

For in making a promise to Abraham God *swore by Himself* 13
(since He could swear by none greater), *I will indeed bless* 14
you and multiply you. **Thus it was that Abraham by his** 15
stedfastness obtained what he had been promised. For as 16
men swear by a greater than themselves, and as an oath
means to them a guarantee that ends any dispute, God, 17
in His desire to afford the heirs of the Promise a special
proof of the solid character of His purpose, interposed with
an oath ; so that by these two solid facts (the Promise 18
and the Oath), where it is impossible for God to be false,
we refugees might have strong encouragement to seize
the hope set before us, anchoring the soul to it safe and 19
secure, as *it enters the inner* **Presence** *behind the veil.*

20 **There Jesus entered for us in advance, when He became high priest** *for ever with the rank of Melchizedek.*

For the moment the writer is content to dwell on the certainty of the divine promise, and to use his reference to it as a means whereby he can revert to the course of his original argument.

The Christian security has a double basis. In the first place there is the **Promise** of God, and that, in itself, should have been a sufficiently firm ground of assurance. Yet there are instances in the Old Testament where God was not satisfied with a mere **Promise,** but added also an **Oath.** Serious thinkers, even among Jews, were not a little exercised over these stories, and found it difficult to explain why it was that God, whose bare word was immutable—a **solid fact**—should feel it necessary to confirm that word by an **Oath.** The best explanation that they could find was one which would probably have appealed to our author, namely that the **Oath** was a concession to human feeling and to human weakness.

It is interesting to note that the oath still had a place in the life of Christians, in spite of the language ascribed to Jesus on the subject.[1] Surely we have here another indication of the fact that the Gospels as they are known to us were not yet current in the Church, though it must be admitted that, in this particular, the principle so clearly laid down by Jesus was slow to be accepted, and is even yet imperfectly recognized. He felt that there was no purpose to be served by taking an oath, i.e. by introducing God into a transaction and placing the perjurer in danger of the divine vengeance, because God was equally concerned, whether formally introduced or not. But the ancient world gave a very high place to the oath, and our evidence suggests that perjury was regarded as almost unthinkable. As a matter of fact, a civil case could be terminated on one of the parties swearing to the facts—**a guarantee that ends any dispute**—and, where the ownership of property had been in dispute, the evidence of such an oath was carefully preserved as an essential part of

[1] Cp. Matt. v. 33–37.

the ' title.' If man had any doubt as to the immutability of a simple **Promise**—itself an unchangeable, **solid, fact**—such lingering suspicion must be wholly dissipated when God, as a concession to human weakness, went so far as to add an **Oath,** so making assurance doubly sure, since, in both actions, **it is impossible for God to be false.**

It goes without saying that an **Oath** taken by God differs in certain respects from that which a man may take. **For men swear by a greater than themselves,** calling down on themselves the vengeance of that **greater** in case they fail to carry out the terms imposed on them. But God can **swear by none greater** ; there is no one above Him to whom He can appeal to see that His word is kept. Therefore He *swore by Himself*, and so gave the assurance that what He had promised was as certain as the laws of His own Being. If God were **false** to His promise, He would cease to be God, and would show Himself to be something else. He has staked His very nature on the fulfilment of His word, and the universe contains no greater surety than that.

The illustration which the writer uses is derived from the story of Abraham's supreme act of faith, his willingness to offer up Isaac, and the words quoted are taken from Gen. xxii. 16f., where God rewards Abraham's obedience with the promise *I will indeed bless you and multiply you.* As the writer read his Bible, he found that this was not the first time God had made such a promise to Abraham,[1] but it was the first time that the promise had been confirmed by an oath. This was equivalent to the actual bestowal of the gifts in question ; God's promise had given Abraham the prospect of entering on a great future, but the oath made the matter so certain as to be a practical fulfilment. We observe that the writer attributes this result to the patriarch's **stedfastness,** using the same word that he has already employed in verse 12, and thereby adds to the strength of the appeal he is making throughout.

We read a little further in the passage, and we realize that the appeal is not merely something which the writer is offering

[1] Cp. Gen xii., 2, 3, xv. 5, xvii. 2–5.

on his own behalf, but that he is subtly conscious that God is speaking through him. For, he says, ' the purpose of this assurance, the strongest that can be given in heaven or on earth, is **that we refugees might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us.**' The word rendered **encouragement** is significant, for, as in xii. 5, it properly means ' an appeal ' to a person to do something, especially to help him who makes it. The underlying thought seems to be that it is God who is making an appeal to men to accept the promise that is held out to them, to receive the hope which is proffered, and to make it the security of their souls. To speak of this as ' **encouragement** ' is to strain the sense of the term to its utmost limits, and we must not forget the meaning that lies behind it. After all, what God wants more than anything else is the salvation of man, and every revelation of Himself is an appeal to His children to accept His love. They are **fugitives,** driven by fear and deadly peril, and, perhaps, not knowing which way to turn for safety. Their Father has an absolutely safe refuge prepared for them, if only they will take advantage of it, and that refuge is the sure **hope** which is held out to them.

It must be admitted that the author is apt to mix his metaphors. Here he does, in a certain sense, betray his ancestry, for the Semite never hesitated to draw pictures in quick succession from entirely different spheres of experience. His mind moved so rapidly that he refused to be tied down to a single class of thought, and passed swiftly from one to another. He never felt it necessary consistently to carry a metaphor through to the end of a passage, but felt free to drop one and take up another at any point where the new one appealed to him as being more suitable. So he speaks of **anchoring the soul to** this hope **safe and sure.** The English somewhat disguises the author's language, for he really speaks of the **hope** as being, so to say, itself the anchor **safe and sure.** The metaphor was familiar to the ancient world, as a symbol of security, and it need not be elaborated ; probably it was so familiar as to have lost some of its original meaning, and to have become a simple phrase for that on which a man may rely for safety.

The confusion of metaphor—or the weakening of the original force of the metaphor—becomes clear when we realize that it is the anchor itself which ***enters the inner*** **presence** ***behind the veil.*** The writer's mind has turned swiftly back to the conception of the High-priesthood of Jesus which plays so prominent a part in his thinking. He has called before him an image of the Temple, with its two central chambers. It is probably true that he had never seen the actual Temple at Jerusalem, and his picture is constructed partly from the instructions given for the building of the Tabernacle, and partly from the accounts given of the Temple of Solomon. Each structure was in two parts, of which the outer, the Holy Place, might, on occasion, be entered by any qualified priest. The inner chamber, however, which contained the Ark and the Cherubim and nothing else, could be entered only by the high priest, and even by him at no other time than on the Day of Atonement. It was the earthly centre of the Jewish faith, the place where, more than anywhere else, Yahweh had His home. As the dwelling of God, it was the spot where man's hope would be most secure, especially since that hope was concentrated in Jesus, who, as the great High Priest, had passed through the curtain which cut this chamber off from the outer hall.

The exclusion of the rest of humanity from the inner secret of God's presence was but a temporary measure. The Judaean Temple was no more than an earthly symbol of the heavenly and eternal dwelling-place of God, and thither should some day go all who put their faith in Jesus. The high priest passed alone into the Holy of Holies in order that he might make atonement for the people; Jesus entered into the supreme Holy of Holies in order that He might draw aside the curtain and open the way for others to follow Him. He was thus a forerunner, one who **entered in advance,** not that He might enjoy spiritual privilege alone, but that He might prepare the way for those who should come after Him. Here, even more clearly than in ii. 10 (where, as we have already seen, the idea is secondary, if it is present at all), Jesus is the **Pioneer,** who makes it possible for us to follow in His footsteps.

The writer has thus, after his somewhat long, but very forcible and impressive, digression, come back once more to the thought with which he wishes especially to deal. He has, by a series of rather obscure transitions, reached the point at which the personal exhortation intruded itself at verse 11. Again he is confronted with the difficulty which had faced him from the first, in his assumption of the doctrine that Jesus is the great High Priest, and he has to explain how it was that one who was not of the tribe of Levi could hold an office confined, not merely to that tribe, but to a particular family within it. This he does by arguing that there was a higher priesthood than that of Aaron. The latter was temporary, and might at any time cease to function, but the true high-priesthood was necessarily eternal. Jesus, therefore, **became High Priest** *for ever with the rank of Melchizedek.* The writer does not seem to have been familiar with the comparatively recent history of his people in Palestine; his knowledge of the Jewish ritual in all its forms was derived from the Bible rather than from observation of the actual practices. But he may have had some acquaintance with the history of the last two centuries B.C., and have been aware of the shameful scandals which stained the high-priestly office—intrigue, corruption, worldliness, and even gross crime—reminding us somewhat of the condition of the Papacy during the later centuries of the Middle Ages. Jesus was not such a High Priest as this.

vii.

1 **For** *Melchizedek, the king of Salem, a priest of the Most High*
God, who met Abraham on his return from the slaughter of
2 *the kings and blessed him*—**who had** *a tenth part of every-*
thing **assigned him by** *Abraham*—**this Melchizedek is**
primarily a *king of righteousness* **(that is the meaning of**
his name); then, besides that, *king of Salem* **(which means,**
3 **king of peace). He has neither father nor mother nor**
genealogy, neither a beginning to his days nor an end of
his life, but, resembling the Son of God, continues to be
***priest* permanently.**

The whole of ch. vii. is devoted to an exposition of the parallel between Melchizedek and Jesus, with the aim of showing how the former was but an adumbration of the latter. The first three verses of the chapter give a description of Melchizedek, bringing out the features which are important for the purpose of comparison. The following points are significant for the argument: (*a*) he is ***king of Salem***; (*b*) he is ***a priest of the Most High God***; (*c*) he ***blessed Abraham***; (*d*) he had a tithe paid to him by Abraham. Equally important is the silence respecting certain details which are usually mentioned in connexion with an outstanding Old Testament character. There is no genealogy of Melchizedek, no section beginning, 'These are the generations of Melchizedek,' and no account of his ancestry.

Of these points, (*c*) and (*d*) receive rather fuller treatment in the immediate sequel; (*b*) would appear to be almost equally significant for the purposes of the argument, but its bearing on the matter is left to be assumed by the readers. The writer may have felt that the Messianic priesthood of Jesus was sufficiently attested by his quotation from Ps. cx. It is briefly noted that he was ***king of Salem*** (**which means, king of peace**), and it is not impossible that the writer had vaguely in mind a Messianic passage which he did not feel it necessary to quote—Isa. ix. 6 f., where 'prince of peace' is one of the names to be borne by the promised child. Melchizedek's own name is also interpreted, though it has no bearing on the reasoning which follows.

What is most stressed in these verses is the silence of the record on points which are usually given in full in the Old Testament. The sense of corporate personality, which played so large a part in framing the thought of the Semitic world, led to the careful preservation of genealogical tables, and, though these did not reach their advanced form till after the Exile, we always expect to find that anybody who is anybody has his ancestry, or at least his father, named, and, possibly, a list of his descendants. Where this is not done, we may assume that there is a special reason. Sometimes it implies that the man in question comes from the lower orders, and

has no standing from the social point of view. A good illustration is to be seen in the popular sneer levelled at the prophets in Samuel's day—'and who is their father?'[1] Among the later prophets we find occasionally that there is no ancestry suggested. Amos, Micah, and Haggai have no 'father'; the two former are, apparently, little more than farm servants. Others have some indication of the descent given, and the limit is reached with Zephaniah, whose line is traced back to a Hezekiah—quite probably the king of Judah.

Melchizedek is suddenly flung on to the stage of history without the least hint as to his forbears. There is no mention of his birth or of his death, nor is there any account of events which took place in his reign before and after his meeting with Abraham. He is introduced into the Bible story for the sake of this one incident, and no more is said about him than is necessary to make its significance clear. He has **neither father nor mother nor genealogy, neither a beginning to his days nor an end to his life.** Yet the author of Hebrews will not draw the usual conclusion from this silence. On the contrary, it is to him a symbol of a unique position in the history of the priesthood, and he can use the passage for his own purposes. As so often happens, the resemblance must not be pressed too far. While it is quite likely that the writer was unaware of the genealogies of Jesus, as found in the First and Third Gospels, he certainly knew that Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah, and had, therefore, some information as to His ancestry. And no form of tradition suggested that the historical Jesus had no **mother,** though the conception of a motherless god was not unfamiliar to the ancient world.[2]

What the author wishes to imply is rather the pre-existence of Jesus as the **Son of God,** or, as other writers would have said, the Logos. In that capacity He had **created the world**—or, rather, the world had been created through Him. Obviously, then, it was impossible for Him to have had a genealogy, since He existed before Time began, and came for a single instant on the stage of human life, just as Melchizedek, who

[1] Sam. x. 12.

[2] Cp. the Greek stories of the births of Athene and Dionysus, both of whom came directly from the body of Zeus.

certainly lived before he met Abraham, appeared once and once only in the biblical record. And, since there is no mention of the death of Melchizedek, the author feels justified in assuming that his is a priesthood which has no end. It must, therefore, find its fulfilment in one who cannot die and cannot be superseded, that is, in one who **continues to be *priest* permanently.** The conditions are satisfied only by Jesus.

Now mark the dignity of this man. The patriarch *Abraham* 4
***paid* him *a tenth* of the spoils. Those sons of Levi who 5**
receive the priestly office are indeed ordered by law to
tithe the people (that is, their brothers), although the
latter are descended from Abraham ; but he who had no 6
Levitical geneaology actually tithed Abraham and *blessed*
the possessor of the promises ! (And there is no question 7
that it is the inferior who is blessed by the superior.)
Again, it is mortal men in the one case who receive *tithes*, 8
while in the other it is one of whom the witness is that
' he lives.' In fact, we might almost say that even Levi 9
the receiver of tithes paid tithes through Abraham ; for 10
he was still in the loins of his father when *Melchizedek*
met him.

It has now been established, by lines of exegesis which are quite in accord with those current in Alexandrian Judaism, that Jesus may not only be compared with Melchizedek, but that He is the latter's true fulfilment. The further consequences of this position are now drawn, and it is shown how far superior Melchizedek was to the official Jewish priesthood, and, therefore, how far Jesus Himself transcends even the traditional high priest. The Jewish priesthood, as known in later times, did not, of course, exist in Melchizedek's days, and the writer, therefore, has to draw his direct conclusions from the relations between Abraham and Melchizedek, and then proceed by an *a fortiori* argument.

First, then, we note that Melchizedek is superior to all other human beings. They are **mortal,** while he **is one of whom the witness is that ' he lives.'** The reasoning on which this

conclusion is based is to be found in the last paragraph, and, though it may sound unconvincing to a modern ear, it is quite in harmony with the methods of exegesis current among learned Jews of the Dispersion in early Christian times. Granted the soundness of the method (as it would be granted by the writer's contemporaries), the conclusion is irresistible ; the immortal is greater than the mortal, and, we may therefore argue, the priesthood which is based on an immortal founder is necessarily superior to one which had a beginning in time, and, therefore, may and will also have an end. Further, the actual recipients of the *tithes* under the Mosaic Law are liable to death, and thereby exhibit their inferiority to Melchizedek.

There is, however, more direct evidence, to be derived from this story. It is recorded that Melchizedek ***blessed*** **the possessor of the promises ! (And there is no question that it is the inferior who is blessed by the superior.)** For the whole conception of blessing springs ultimately from very primitive ideas, which we can trace as far back as we can discover any real human consciousness. Even to-day, we all recognize that there is a mysterious something which people appear to possess in varying degrees, and which gives them different grades of authority, apart from any office or position which they may hold. In modern times we disguise our ignorance of its nature by calling it ' personality,' but we cannot define what we mean by the term ; all we know is that some people carry about with them an air of power which others partially or wholly lack. Primitive man also found an indefinable power in a far wider sphere, and included much which we should to-day ascribe to other qualities. Success in hunting, victory in battle, the ability to control other men, these and many other characteristics were attributed to the possession of an excess of ' power.' Anthropologists are familiar with the conception, which is to be found even in the lowest types of human thought, and is sometimes held to be the root from which all religion has sprung. The favourite term for it is *mana*, a word derived from the vocabulary of certain Polynesians, though the Iroquois term *orenda* is sometimes used as covering much the

same range of ideas and feelings. In primitive communities, to 'bless' is to impart '*mana*,' and, obviously, this can be done only by a person who has it in excess. If we may venture on a physical parallel, we may compare the 'flow of electricity from an overcharged body to one that is deficient, the principal difference being that in the latter case the operation is natural and inevitable, while the bestowal of a 'blessing' depends on the deliberate will of the person who gives it. There are certain conditions and occasions when the supply of *mana* will be abnormally great; one such is the hour that immediately precedes death, and hence it follows that the last utterances of a dying man are charged with a peculiar significance and creative power.

Now it is clear that, to the primitive mind (and no amount of logic or education wholly succeeds in eliminating some of these primitive conceptions, even though they may not be consciously present), the person who can give a 'blessing,' and is, therefore, possessed of a larger store of this vital force than others, is **superior** to the recipient. When, therefore, Melchizedek **blessed** Abraham, even though the latter was **the possessor of the promises,** he exhibited a real superiority over him, and, *a fortiori*, over all his successors. Neither the contemporaries of Jesus nor the writers of the Gospels would have analysed their own feelings as we should do to-day, but they would have agreed with the writer of this Epistle that Jesus had in a unique degree this personal, vital force. It is described, or rather involved, in the term **authority.**[1] In His power to make men follow Him by a single word of command, to cast out evil spirits, to cure disease of many kinds, and in the originality of His teaching, Jesus showed a power which others did not possess, or possessed only in a minor degree, and in these and other acts He exhibited the **superiority** which is, in another way, exemplified in the act of effectual blessing.

The clearest illustration of the superiority of Melchizedek (and so of Jesus) to the historical priesthood is to be seen in the reference to **tithes.** It is one of the established social principles of the East that it is the function of the inferior to

[1] Cp. Mark i. 22, 27, xi. 28, 29.

bring ' gifts '—we should rather say ' tribute '—to his acknowledged superior. True, the higher may confer boons on the lower, but he is not bound to do so, and if he does, it will be regarded as an act of special benevolence, for there is no obligation resting upon him. On the other hand, where a gift is compulsory, the fact of its presentation is an admission of subordinate rank. This is a point of view which repeatedly emerges in the history of Israel's dealings with the great world-powers. As long as the kingdoms remained dependent on Assyria or on Babylon, they were compelled to pay tribute, and the withholding of the normal dues was invariably construed as an act of revolt. So the payment of **tithes** to Levi, ordained by the Law, was evidence that, though all were **brothers,** since all were **descended from Abraham,** there was a distinction made, and the rest stood on a lower level than the Levites and priests.

So when **the patriarch *Abraham paid*** Melchizedek ***a tenth* of the spoils,** he admitted the authority and the superiority of the ***priest of the Most High God.*** It followed, as a matter of course, that all who were descended from Abraham shared in this comparative inferiority, since they were, from the point of view of the ' corporate personality ' members of their ancestor. They even included Levi, and so the Aaronic priests, for Levi **was still in the loins of his father.** There is, therefore, an ascending grade of position. At the bottom are the great mass of the Israelites, above them come the Levites, to whom the rest pay tithes, next Abraham, who sums up all in himself, and, at the summit, Melchizedek, to whom even Abraham paid tithes. Since it has been already shown that all that may be posited of Melchizedek may, with greater force, be posited of Jesus, it follows that Christ, **a priest for ever, with the rank of Melchizedek,** rightly takes His place far ahead of all the priests of the old Covenant.

11 **Further, if the Levitical priesthood had been the means of reaching perfection (for it was on the basis of that priesthood that the Law was enacted for the People), why was it still necessary for another sort of priest to emerge *with the rank***

of Melchizedek, instead of simply *with the rank* of Aaron
(for when the priesthood is changed, a change of law
necessarily follows) ? He who is thus described belongs to
another tribe, no member of which ever devoted himself to
the altar ; for it is evident that our Lord sprang from
Judah, and Moses never mentioned priesthood in connec-
tion with that tribe. This becomes all the more plain
when another *priest* emerges *resembling Melchizedek*, one
who has become a priest by the power of an indissoluble
Life and not by the law of an external command ; for the
witness to Him is,

Thou art priest for ever, with the rank of Melchizedek.

There is still an aspect of the question which remains to be treated. To the position which the writer takes up it might be objected, ' But, even granting that Melchizedek, and so Jesus, had a position of unique rank *before* the giving of the Mosaic Law, does not the institution of the Aaronic priesthood necessarily supersede the earlier dispensation, and leave the new order in that supremacy which, formerly, no doubt, might justly have been claimed by Melchizedek and Christ ? ' This is the problem which the author now proceeds to state.

The objection is based on the assumption that the Law was God's last word to man, a theory which would have been vigorously maintained by men like Philo and others of the philosophical Jewish school. But, like St. Paul, the author of Hebrews maintained that the Law was a temporary expedient, and was never intended to have permanent validity. He reached this conclusion by a very different path from that which St. Paul followed, and it did not, to him, occupy the same profoundly important position. Indeed, it simply slips in here as a parenthesis, because it is a necessary corollary of the transitory nature of the priesthood. For without the priesthood, the Law could not have functioned, since so much of it was dependent on the sacrificial system ; it was on the basis of that priesthood that the Law was enacted for the People.

The Law, however, was neither immutable nor eternal. It

was given to a particular people, and for a definite period, and, while it might be the best expression of the will of God for that time and for that race, it could claim no permanence. We are reminded of St. Paul's handling of the same subject, expressed in language like **'the Law . . . held us as wards in discipline, till such time as Christ came.'** The conclusion which the Apostle draws is different, it is true, from that which appealed to our author—indeed the position is hardly used here to draw any conclusion at all, it is little more than a casual reference to an inevitable result of the view adopted on other grounds—but there is at any rate a general agreement between the two as to the imperfection and evanescence of the Law.

The Law, then, must have undergone a change, or, at least, have been subject to a change. The latter part of verse 12 does not mean so much **'a change of Law necessarily follows,'** as **'a change of Law is necessarily** involved'; the modification of the Law may precede or accompany that of the priesthood. But the two do go together, and the one implies the other. What is certain and obvious is that the priesthood has undergone a change, and that the **Levitical priesthood** was not **the means of reaching perfection.** That institution had not been original, for another priesthood—one superior to Abraham and all his descendants—had existed centuries before the Law came into being. And, centuries after the Law was given, the psalmist spoke of that same ancient priesthood, as being the ideal which should find its fulfilment only in the Christ. The Law-ordained priesthood was that of **Aaron,** and it was still **necessary for another sort of priest to emerge.** There was already in existence this priesthood which had ***the rank of Melchizedek***, and all the conditions were fulfilled when this once more **emerged.** It had been, apparently, in abeyance for centuries, while the Aaronic order took its place, but now the time, foretold by the psalmist, had arrived when it should resume its true position.

This makes it possible to meet a difficulty which, at first sight, might seem to invalidate the theory just stated. **'It is evident,'** he says, **'that our Lord sprang from Judah, and Moses**

never mentioned priesthood in connexion with that tribe.' Clearly the writer, though he seems to have known nothing of the detailed genealogies of Jesus, was familiar with the tradition which derived Him from Judah, and it is a little strange that he did not make full use of the Messianic passages which connected the coming Christ with that tribe. Probably the explanation is to be found in the fact that it was no part of his purpose to prove in general that Jesus was the Messiah, but simply to show that He fulfilled the ideal priesthood. The fact of the physical ancestry was so well known among Christians as to make it unnecessary to elaborate the point, since it had no bearing on the main argument.

The limitation of the priesthood to the family of **Aaron,** then, was one of the non-permanent elements in the situation imposed by the Law. It is to be noted that Melchizedek had **neither father nor mother nor genealogy,** and, therefore, the priesthood which was based upon him had no restriction in the matter of descent. He was not even a son of Abraham, but could be regarded only as a Gentile. *A fortiori* a member of an Israelite tribe, even though he were not a Levite, could not be excluded from the Messiahship, and the suggestion of the open door was rather that he would more properly belong to another tribe. So the contrast between the temporary and the eternal **becomes all the more plain.** Aaron and his sons held office in virtue of a **law of an external command.** These words do not bring out the full force of the writer's meaning. Literally, he speaks of a ' carnal ' **command** ; it is one which belongs to the realm of man's physical nature, and bears only indirectly on his spiritual being. Contrasted with this is the **witness** which says, **Thou art a priest for ever.** This belongs to the realm of the eternal, and attests the **power of an indissoluble,** indestructible, **Life.**

A previous command is set aside on account of its weakness 18
and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and 19
there is introduced a better Hope, by means of which we
can draw near to God. A better Hope, because it was not 20
promised apart from an oath. Previous priests became 21

priests apart from any oath, but He has an oath from Him who said to Him,

The Lord has sworn, and He will not change His mind,
Thou art a priest for ever.

22 **And this makes Jesus surety for a superior covenant.**
23 **Also, while they became priests in large numbers, since**
24 **death prevents them from continuing to serve, He holds His priesthood without any successor, since He continued**
25 *for ever.* **Hence for all time, He is able to save those who approach God through Him, as He is always living to intercede on their behalf.**

The writer now allows himself to dwell at somewhat greater length on the change from the old order to the new. In language which sounds almost like an echo of St. Paul, he suggests the reason why the Mosaic dispensation was superseded, and a fresh one introduced. The ground for the annulment of the former is simply stated, **a previous command is set aside on account of its weakness and uselessness.** A technical term is used here, which would be employed of the repeal of a law or of the quashing of a sentence. The Law may have been as much as Israel could endure, but for the complete purposes of God it was a failure. It must be remembered that the author is thinking all the time, not so much of the Law as a whole, as of those ritual elements in it which were designed to eliminate the results of sin, and to restore the ideal relation between man and God. That was the object of all the paraphernalia of priesthood and sacrifice, of regulations as to ceremonial and holiness. But experience had shown (as it has shown in every form of merely ritual faith) that the measures thus adopted could not but fail in their purpose. An 'atonement' which is based simply on human action can never be morally and spiritually stronger than man, and when the Christian's hymn tells him that

Not all the blood of beasts,
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain,

he is simply receiving a statement of a universal experience, couched in language which is suited to his own particular tradition. An adjective indicating any other religious faith might be substituted for ' Jewish,' and the statement would be equally true. A temporary relief and sense of spiritual well-being may be thus secured, but no valid alteration in the moral relationship between man and God can be thereby effected. It is the distinguishing mark of the Christian Gospel among the world's religious beliefs, that it offers man a God-made atonement, and simply invites him to accept it as a free gift. The writer lays his finger on the supreme tragedy of all other religions, when he says of the noblest of them that its central act is marked by **weakness and uselessness.**

For **the Law made nothing perfect.** That is to say, it finished nothing, brought nothing to its full completion. As the writer proposes to show later, even such partial success as it had was merely temporary, and the work had to be done again and again. Every year the high priest must **enter the** Holy of Holies, and perform his purifying and atoning **task.** In its place, therefore, there **was introduced** (again a legal term for a new enactment) something **better,** which the writer deliberately refrains from calling a law, since it has so little in common with that which it has superseded. In order to mark the distinction, and to bring out yet more clearly its influence on the human spirit, he names it a **hope.** This does effect something valid, since it enables us **to draw near to God.** Under the old dispensation man was still at a distance from God, even though his sin might, for the time being, be wiped away. But the phrase used implies just that reconstruction of personal relations between God and man which a merely sacrificial system was powerless to achieve ; it is indeed a **better hope.**

We now have brought before us again a thought which has already been mentioned, and this time rather more stress is laid upon it. This is the **oath** which God took in establishing the new order of priesthood. We have already discussed the place taken in the writer's thought by the divine **oath,** and

we have seen that he must have regarded it as superfluous, since God's bare word is sufficient guarantee of His fidelity. But, here again, we may defend the position adopted by reminding ourselves of the view that this **oath** was a concession to human weakness, and that men may well have found reason for stronger **hope** in a matter which had received this double attestation. In the Mosaic order, **priests became priests apart from any oath,** for they were appointed simply by divine command. But in the case of the Christ, God **has sworn, and He will not change His mind, Thou art a priest for ever.** The superiority of Jesus to any earlier **priest** is thus abundantly certified.

At this point we have introduced the idea of the **covenant,** which is to play a larger part in the discussion at a later point. Here it is enough to note that the whole of the religion of Israel was conceived under this guise. It was a partnership between the people and God, and there is no other phrase which so completely sums up the relation between the two parties, human and divine. It goes back to the first institution of the Law, and so to the first introduction of the people to their God and of the God to His people. In a certain sense the whole spiritual history of Israel is the record of this covenant, of its failures and of its restorations, till it culminated in the words of Jesus on the last night of His earthly life. Doubtless the writer has in the background the great prophecy of the new Covenant,[1] and thinks of it as being the **superior covenant** introduced by Jesus. At all events, Christ has become the **surety** for the new order. Once more a legal term appears, that which would be used of one person ' going bail ' for another. Jesus guarantees the reality and the efficacy of the fresh arrangement, and His support is absolutely reliable, since it, in turn, is based on a divine **oath.** One who has at his disposal all the resources of infinity will not fail men in their need.

There is another distinction between the old priesthood and that of Jesus. The Jewish priests were mortal, and there was, therefore, a long succession of them. Jesus, on the other

[1] Cp. Jer. xxxi. 31–34.

hand, is but one, and He endures through all eternity, since He never dies ; His is a priesthood which **continues for ever.** Every age, relying on the experience of its predecessors, can **approach God through Him,** for **He is able to save for all time.** It would seem that this last phrase has a further meaning than the merely temporal, and the older rendering ' to the uttermost ' gives a nearer indication of what the writer had in view. His thought, of course, includes the idea of the endless power of Jesus to redeem men, but it suggests also that there are practically no depths of sinfulness from which He cannot and will not rescue them. It is noticeable that His special function is described as **living to intercede** for men. That is one aspect of the priesthood which cannot be overlooked, though comparatively little stress is laid upon it. Standing, as he does, between man and God, the priest has to represent the former to the latter, and see to it that the human case is justly and sympathetically presented before the throne of the supreme Judge.

Such was the high priest for us, saintly, innocent, unstained, 26
lifted high above the heavens, far from all contact with 27
the sinful, one who has no need, like yonder high priests,
day by day to offer sacrifices first for their own sins and
then for those of the People—He did that once for all in
offering up Himself. For the Law appoints human beings 28
in their weakness to the priesthood ; but the word of the
Oath appoints a Son who is made perfect *for ever.*

In these three verses we have a summary of the whole of the chapter, which brings out those features of it which are most significant for the general argument, and, at the same time, prepares the way for the next stage in the progress of the thought of the Epistle. The two points stressed are the unique and sinless character of Jesus, and the fact that His functions were fulfilled in a single act played upon the stage of time. The two are intimately connected with one another, but each has its definite place in the thinking of the writer.

The Law appoints human beings in their weakness to the

priesthood; but the word of the Oath appoints a Son who is made perfect ***for ever.*** There is the great contrast between the two types, and it has been sufficiently elaborated in the preceding chapters to need no further discussion. The sentence is, in a sense, a summary of the whole argument up to this point, and reinforces the author's view of the great function of Jesus, and of His relation to the old Jewish Law. It is interesting to note that, since his mood is at this stage purely dialectic, the writer does not emphasize what appealed to him so strongly, the fact that Jesus, though free from the **weakness** of ordinary man, has yet had the experience which will enable Him completely to sympathize with it.

That separation from all evil is concisely stated in verse 26. **Such was the high priest for us**—the phrase used is a bold one, and means literally '**such a high priest** befitted us,' involving the same word which appeared in ii. 10 ('**it was befitting**'). God's plan is a consistent whole, and every part must be in accord with every other. The divine self-consistency, in evolving a means for the salvation of man, demanded an intermediary, a high priest, such as has been described in the foregoing paragraphs. He must be **saintly,** holy, set apart and reserved for His special function. He must be **innocent,** in the sense that no evil attaches itself to Him. He is not necessarily ignorant of evil; on the contrary the whole feeling of the Epistle implies that Jesus knows more of sin than any sinner. But He must be Himself free from any fault or suspicion of fault. There must be no joint in His moral armour, no gap in His spiritual defences, and we might paraphrase the term by calling the quality implied 'integrity,' or 'blamelessness.' He must be **unstained,** with no relic of a past act of sin lying on His record, and **far from contact with the sinful.** The high priest was always faced with the danger of contamination from those who were round about him, and, as a matter of fact, was kept from all risk of contact with human impurity for a week before the actual Day of Atonement. Having kept His own soul pure of evil throughout His earthly life, Jesus is now **lifted high above the heavens.** We are reminded of an earlier phrase which tells us that He has

sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,[1] where there is no longer any danger lest He should come into contact with anything that might defile.

Further, Jesus differs from the Jewish high priest in another supremely important way. This celestial separation from defilement would be impossible if His atoning sacrifice needed repetition, for then He would be obliged to enter the world and to remain in it, not once, but many times. His work, however, was done **once for all in offering up Himself.** It seems that, in drawing the contrast here, the writer has fallen into some confusion. The Day of Atonement, the only occasion in the ecclesiastical calendar when the high priest, as distinct from all other priests, was required, came but once in the year. Yet the priests mentioned are compelled **day by day to offer sacrifices first for their own sins and then for those of the People.** There was a daily sacrifice, offered morning and evening, where the whole body of priests might minister in rotation. But it was in no sense a sin-offering, nor was it in any way connected with the conception of atonement, and it is the latter type of sacrifice which is clearly in the writer's mind. There are other indications which suggest that the author had only a book-knowledge of the Jerusalem ritual, and had never participated in it or witnessed it himself. Moreover, he is apt, at times, to run cognate ideas together in a fashion which looks confusing to the modern mind. Still, his case is clear ; Jesus does all, and more than all, that any priest could do. He is the great High Priest.

V. viii. 1–x. 39 : Jesus, the Sacrifice

It has been of great importance to the writer, for the purposes of his dialectic, to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of that which was foreshadowed in the Jewish priesthood, and, especially, in the position of the high priest. This has given us the picture of Christ making atonement for the sins of men,

[1] i. 3.

entering into the spiritual Holy of Holies, and there completing, once and for all, the divine work already adumbrated in the Day of Atonement.

This, however valuable, would not carry a Christian thinker far enough. It would explain the life and character of Jesus, and satisfy men that it was He and no other who came finally to redeem mankind. But it would offer no adequate account of the method by which that redemption was secured. Nor would it wholly explain the death of Jesus, though it would throw some light upon it through the suggestion that the great High Priest must enter into all human suffering, and must know the lowest depths of human woe. But even that leaves us with a feeling that the last word has not been said, and, from the point of view taken by this writer it is especially inadequate, since it has no bearing on the actual historic priesthood. And, more than anything else, it is the Cross which, to the Christian, requires explanation. That is the centre of his faith, and is the *differentia* of his religion. The writer, therefore, now undertakes an exposition of the death of Jesus in the light of Old Testament sacrifice, especially that element in the ritual which brings out the conception of the Covenant.

viii.

1 **The point* of all this is, we do have such a high priest, one**
who is *seated at the right hand* **of the throne of Majesty**
2 **in the heavens, and who officiates in** *the* **sanctuary or true**
3 *tabernacle set up by the Lord* **and not by man. Now, as**
every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices,
4 **He too must have something to offer. Were He on earth,**
He would not be a priest at all, for there are priests already
5 **to offer the gifts prescribed by Law (men who serve a mere**
outline and shadow of the heavenly—as Moses was
instructed, when he was about to execute the building of
the tabernacle : *see*, **God said,** *that you make everything*
6 *on the pattern shown you upon the mountain*). **As it is,**
however, the divine service He has obtained is superior,
owing to the fact that He mediates a superior covenant,
enacted with superior promises.

* Or, as Coverdale translates, 'the pith.' 'All this' means 'all the previous argument.'

The writer now sums up the whole of his previous argument as to the High-priesthood of Jesus in a single sentence. The gist of what he has been saying, the point and pith of it, can be summarized in a very few words. There is no necessity to repeat what has been said about Melchizedek—he has served his purpose as a point of comparison, and there need be no further reference to him. His appearance in history has been sufficient to show that the Levitical priesthood, as established by the Mosaic Law, was not the only possible hierarchy, nor even the best man could know; on the contrary, **we do have such a high priest** as that which has been described in the last chapter, **One who is *seated at the right hand* of the throne of Majesty in the heavens.** It is now possible to move forward, and to consider the functions of the new High Priest, especially in comparison with those with whom Israel had been familiar. This will lead up to the mention of sacrifice, and will bring out the meaning of the death of Jesus in relation to the eternal Covenant.

Every high priest, in the nature of the case, **officiates** in some **sanctuary.** That is to say, he has certain recognized duties, not necessarily menial work, to perform. There was in ancient Athens a custom whereby a wealthy citizen might be called upon to perform some task of national importance, by paying for the expenses of some public undertaking—supplying a warship or producing a play, or some other service designed for the general good. The word used to describe this duty is that employed here to indicate the position of the priest who **officiates** in holy things, and from it our term 'liturgy' is derived. The priest in question is one who carries out the most important of the duties connected with the **sanctuary** for the benefit of the people as a whole.

The **sanctuary,** however, in which He ministers, is not that erected in accordance with the Mosaic Law. We need to realize that the writer has in his mind the conception of a double world. This is, indeed, the metaphysical basis of his thinking, and it is so deeply implanted in him that he alludes to it half consciously, as though it were something to be taken for granted. In the history of philosophy it is to be traced

back to Plato, but we cannot mistake the fact that we have here Platonism as expounded by Philo and other Jewish-Alexandrian philosophers.

We may state the doctrine briefly as follows: Everything which can be perceived by human senses, everything belonging to the world of matter, exists in virtue of an ultimate 'idea.' This, Philo (though not Plato) would have said, is a kind of divine thought; it exists in the mind of God. A city must actually come into being in the mind of the architect before a single brick can be laid or a stone hewn. What appears afterwards to other men is no more than a copy, more or less imperfect, of the 'idea' of the city as originally planned. The true city is that which no eye has ever seen or ever will see, that on which no hand can be laid. We have in common speech a reference to this metaphysical theory in our use of the word 'ideal' in the sense of 'perfect.' We say that a thing is 'ideal' when we think it corresponds exactly to the 'idea' as it exists in the mind of God. The ideal is the real; it is the pattern according to which everything is made. The one realm is that of heaven; the other is that of earth. Things which appear—'phenomena'—are **a mere outline and shadow of the heavenly.**

This general principle is now applied to the **sanctuary.** We have, on the one hand, that which was built by **Moses.** This belongs to the inferior realm, that of the 'phenomena,' not to the ideal and **heavenly** sphere. There is no need for an additional priest for the service of this **sanctuary,** since it is **already** well served by the **priests** who **offer the gifts prescribed by Law.** If, then, Jesus were **on earth,** i.e. if He belonged to the inferior order, **He would not be a priest at all.** Perhaps we have here a covert reminiscence of the ancestry of Jesus, who came of the tribe of Judah, not of that of Levi, and, therefore, rests His claims to a high-priesthood on some superior order of being.

On the other hand, we have this **true *tabernacle set up by the Lord* and not by man.** This is the ***pattern shown*** to Moses ***upon the mountain,*** and the earthly **tabernacle** was valid—indeed, we may even say that it existed—only because it was

a copy of the heavenly original. It is in this that Jesus officiates, just as the Levitical priests do their service in the earthly home of God. The parallel goes further than the mere structure in connexion with which the service is performed, and extends to the nature of the duties for which the high priest is appointed.

In the earlier stages of religious and ecclesiastical development, the part played by the priests in sacrifice was comparatively small. They were primarily the guardians of the shrine and the interpreters of the god to his worshippers and of the worshippers to their god. When sacrifice was offered, it was the giver himself who slew the victim, and arranged for the disposal of the greater part of the carcase—at all events in the 'peace-offering.' The priest's duties were to present at the altar the blood and those portions of the flesh and fat which were reserved for burning, while he had the right to take for himself certain parts of the victim after it was cooked. But here, as in other ways, the writer leads us to suspect that his knowledge of the sacrificial system was derived from books only, and that he had never come into actual contact with the regular ceremonial of the Temple. He is still thinking of the ritual of the Day of Atonement, and is combining with it certain ceremonies observed in the making of covenants. In the former the high priest was all-important, and it was the gifts and sacrifices of the Day which he was especially appointed to offer. In the case of Jesus also, therefore, similar functions must be performed, or He would not have been a high priest at all, so He too must have something to offer. The precise nature and significance of the sacrifice made by Jesus is to be brought out more fully later; here it is enough to note that in this respect, as in all others, Jesus fulfils the ideal.

Wherever the writer has had occasion to compare Jesus with others, he has been concerned to emphasize His superiority. Here, too, He stands far above the types of high priest whom the Jewish world has yet known. The obvious reason for this is that He mediates a superior covenant, enacted with superior promises. The thought will be more fully developed in the next paragraph, where it will be shown that the old covenant

was inadequate, and had to yield its place to a new. Another conception for which we have here the starting-point is that of the Mediator. This, again, is amplified later, and we may regard verse 6 as being an introductory summary of much of the argument which is to follow.

7 **For if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have**
8 **been no occasion for a second. Whereas God does find fault with the people of that covenant, when He says :**

The day is coming, saith the Lord,
when I will conclude a new covenant with the house of
Israel and with the house of Judah.
It will not be on the lines of the covenant I made with
their fathers,
9 *on the day I took them by the hand to lead out of Egypt's*
land ;
for they would not hold to My covenant,
so I let them alone, saith the Lord.
10 *This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel*
when that day comes, saith the Lord ;
I will set My laws within their mind,
inscribing them upon their hearts ;
I will be a God to them,
and they shall be a People to Me ;
11 *one citizen will no longer teach his fellow,*
one man will no longer teach his brother,
saying, 'Know the Lord,'
for all will know Me, low and high together,
12 *I will be merciful to their iniquities,*
and remember their sins no more.

13 **By saying 'a *new* covenant,' He antiquates the first. And whatever is antiquated and aged is on the verge of vanishing.**

The sentence with which the last paragraph concluded contained two key-words, **covenant** and **mediates.** To the former of these the writer now devotes his attention, before passing on to determine the place which Jesus holds in the new order.

We need to remember that in a certain sense the whole spiritual history of Israel may be summed up in the word **covenant.** When the people first settled in Palestine, and even during the wilderness period, their ideas of God, as far as we can tell, differed very slightly from those of their contemporaries and neighbours. True, they were the people of Yahweh, but that did not mean that there were no other gods. Certainly to a late time in the monarchy, and probably to the Exile itself, men believed in the existence of other deities, and in their validity for other lands and other peoples. Chemosh was just as much the true god for the Moabites as Yahweh was for Israel, and each people was recognized as owing allegiance to its own divine king. But there was one fundamental difference between the relation of Yahweh to Israel and that of the other gods to their respective tribes. The rest were originally and always members of the communities which revered them ; Chemosh always was a Moabite, had never been anything else, and could never be anything else. The relation between him and Moab was natural and inevitable. But Yahweh had existed long before Israel came into contact with Him, and could continue to exist apart from His people. The connexion between God and tribe was neither natural nor inevitable ; it was artificial, brought into being at a special point in time, and it was the result of a deliberate act of choice on the part of Yahweh, and of an equally deliberate act of acceptance on the part of the people. The whole meaning of the story of Sinai (or Horeb) is that there the two parties, hitherto independent of, and separate from, one another, were welded into a single whole, and thus achieved that kind of unity which, in other cases, was bound up with the nature of things. In other words, the bond which connected Yahweh and Israel was a *Covenant*, a voluntary agreement into which the two parties entered upon specified terms.

It is, however, not until near the end of the monarchic period of Israel's history that the conception of this Covenant relation is greatly stressed. The reformation of Josiah was based on a book (probably Deuteronomy, or an early form of the book —though this is now disputed in some quarters) which

purported to contain the terms of the Covenant, and it is to the experience of the greatest man of that age that we must look for light on its value and meaning. Jeremiah was still a young prophet when Josiah carried his reforms through, and seems[1] to have approved heartily of the movement. But the years brought disillusionment, and he found that a written document was both imperfect in itself and also was exposed to the danger of tampering by interested parties, particularly the priestly scribes.[2] Finally, after the great disaster which brought the kingdom of Judah to an end, the prophet's hopes revived, and he gave utterance to the oracle quoted by our author,[3] one of the noblest passages in the whole of the Old Testament.

The failure of the written Covenant had shown Jeremiah that something deeper and more durable was needed if there was to be a valid union between Yahweh and His people. A merely external agreement was sure to be broken, sooner or later, and the only way in which God could secure the allegiance of His people was to *set* His *laws within their mind, inscribing them upon their hearts.* The terms were the same as they had always been; there was a union of Israel and Yahweh, expressed by the latter in the words: *I will be a God to them, and they shall be a People to Me,* or, in modern English idiom, 'I will become their God, and they shall become My People.' But the method of ratifying the union of the two parties was a novel one, and Jeremiah's prophecy of the *new covenant* is one of the great landmarks in the history of man's dealings with God.

For the moment, however, this was not the aspect of the matter which was uppermost in the mind of the writer. The **covenant** to him meant far more than what the simple but comprehensive phrase of Jeremiah suggests. It included every aspect of the relation of Israel to Yahweh, and the term has almost the significance which its related word 'Testament' has for us when we speak of the Old and New Testaments. It certainly comprised the whole of the Law, and, since the

[1] Cp. Jer. xi. 1–8. [2] Cp. Jer. viii. 8.
[3] Jer. xxxi. 31–34.

writer was dealing more particularly with the regulations for the conduct of worship and the offering of sacrifice, it was to these elements in the Law that he especially applied it.

Even within these limits, the purpose with which the passage is cited is far from general, and, where Jeremiah had been forced to the conviction that there would be a *new covenant* by the failure of the old, the author of Hebrews deduces the inadequacy of the old from the mention of the new. There was a covenant already in existence, a God-given system whereby the right relations between the worshipper and the object of his worship might be maintained. Why, then, should it be necessary to speak of a *new covenant* at all? The very fact that a change was conceivable implied that the old arrangement did not, and could not, fulfil its purpose properly. The language used is strong: **God** actually **does find fault with the people of that covenant,** and it is not only the people who are to blame. The old Covenant itself is open to serious charges; it was far from being **faultless.** We might reply that if that were so, then the blame must rest with the God who gave it, but the writer would almost certainly have met this objection by saying that it was the best thing that Israel could then bear, and that the world was not yet ready for the perfect union which God planned and desired. The **first covenant** was a temporary expedient, and, in the nature of the case, must, sooner or later, become **antiquated** and obsolete. When that time came it would be **on the verge of vanishing,** since, valuable as it had been in its prime, its work was done. With the death of Jesus the new order began, and the abolition of the old was not far away.

We have several times had occasion to suspect that the writer had never been in direct contact with the ritual as actually performed in Jerusalem, and his line of argument gives rise to the further possibility that the Temple services had already come to an end, i.e. that he was writing after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. If that be so, we can understand his eagerness to show that the divine revelation had not ceased, but that it was being continued in a more perfect form than it had ever assumed in the old days of continual sacrifice. He,

and those like-minded with him, believed that they had in the Old Testament the very Word of God, and that the Jewish ceremonial was divinely appointed for the salvation of man, or, at least, of the Jewish people. The prescribed method was through sacrifice, but that was now no longer possible, and it remained to discover some other road by which man might reach the heart of God.

Time has justified the writer's point of view. No Christian would deny the value of the Law for Israel in the old days, and every intelligent follower of Jesus would recognize a spiritual continuity as between the old Covenant and the new. But the centuries have passed and there has been no restoration of the ancient ritual. Never for a moment have the Jews been the chief authority in their historic capital, and, on the very site of the Temple there still stands one of the greatest sanctuaries of another faith. On political grounds alone it has been impossible that the old order should be renewed. And now it is even doubtful whether, if the Jewish people could be restored to complete possession and sole authority in Jerusalem, they would desire the re-establishment of the old sacrificial system. When Jesus came into the world it was **antiquated, aged, and . . . on the point of vanishing,** a generation later it had gone, apparently for ever, and the world, Jewish and Christian alike, has had to find its life in a **covenant** whose terms have been inscribed on men's **hearts.**

ix.

1 **The first covenant had indeed its regulations for worship and**
2 **a material sanctuary. A tent was set up, the outer tent,**
containing the lampstand, the table, and the loaves of the
3 **Presence ; this is called the Holy place. But behind the**
4 **second veil was the tent called the Holy of Holies, contain-**
ing the golden altar of incense, and also the ark of the
covenant covered all over with gold, which held the golden
pot of manna, the rod of Aaron that once blossomed, and
5 **the tablets of the covenant ; above this were the cheru-**
bims of the Glory, overshadowing the mercy seat—matters
which it is impossible for me to discuss at present in detail.

We now turn to the conditions of sacrifice under the old régime, and these are introduced by a brief description—as far as the writer understood his documents—of the Tabernacle. It is worth noting that his reference is not to the Temple ; he does not mention either that of Solomon, that of Zerubbabel or that of Herod. Here we have further evidence of the fact that he was relying, not on memories of the actual ritual as performed in the Temple, but on the written description of the Tabernacle as contained in the Law. Even so, his account is not quite accurate, in at least one point which has struck most modern readers.

The contrast between the two orders is brought out at the start by the reference to the **first covenant, its regulations for worship and its material sanctuary.** There is some doubt as to the meaning of the word rendered **material,** since in some connexions it might mean ' universal ' or even ' orderly ' or ' ornamented.' But the probability is that the term is used in the sense suggested by the translation, and definitely contrasts this earthly and physical **sanctuary** with that which is heavenly and purely spiritual. The writer could, no doubt, have made good use of every item in the list of furniture, but there is very little which bears on his immediate purpose, and he contents himself with a mere enumeration, adding that **it is impossible for** him **to discuss** these things **in detail.**

The description of the sanctuary and of what it contained is taken in the main from Exod. xxv., xxvi., with one or two extra features which seem to be derived from traditions current among the Jews of the Dispersion. Special attention is called to the fact that the Tabernacle had two chambers, the **outer tent,** or **Holy Place,** and, separated from it by a **veil** or curtain, an inner room known as **the Holy of Holies.** The former contained most of the furniture used in the normal ritual, the **lampstand** on which stood the lights which were never suffered to go out, and **the table** on which the **loaves of the Presence** were placed week by week.

So far the writer's account is in strict agreement with the data supplied by the Old Testament. But when he comes to speak of the **Holy of Holies,** he seems at times to be following

a tradition of which there are traces elsewhere, but which was manifestly incorrect, even from his own point of view. For the first article which he places therein is **the golden altar of incense.** Now it is expressly stated in Exod. xl. 26 that this was set ' in the tent of meeting, in front of the curtain,' i.e. in the Holy Place and not in the Holy of Holies. It is true that the language used in the Greek translation (obviously the only form of the Old Testament with which the writer of Hebrews was familiar) is rather more ambiguous than the original Hebrew, but it is clear that this particular altar could not have been inside the inner chamber, since it was in daily use. In pre-exilic times the term rendered in the Old Testament by the English word ' incense ' usually implied the fat and other portions of every victim which were reserved for Yahweh alone. These, however, were burnt upon the great altar of burnt-offering, which seems, indeed, to be the only altar contemplated in most of the regulations given in the early chapters of Leviticus. Later, as it seems, the term ' incense ' was narrowed down to a preparation of spices, and these were offered only on the golden altar. But, in the complete form of the ritual, they were presented daily,[1] and the priest must, therefore, have had continual access to the altar on which they were burned. Further, when, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, he had to take with him a censer containing coals from the great altar, in order to burn incense in the inner sanctuary, making it clear that in this chamber there was no altar suitable for the purpose.[2] Ministry at the ' altar of incense ' could not possibly have been confined to the high priest, nor was it employed only on the Day of Atonement, and it is clear that the writer, in accepting this form of the tradition, failed to realize that, even from his own point of view, he was falling into an inconsistency.

All tradition, however, placed the **ark of the covenant** and also the **cherubim of the Glory** inside the **Holy of Holies.** And all agreed that **the tablets of the covenant,** the two stones on which the Decalogue was inscribed, were inside the ark. But

[1] Exod. xxx. 7, 8. [2] Lev. xvi. 12, 13.

nowhere in the Old Testament is it stated that the **pot of manna** and **the rod of Aaron** were also kept there. In the Hebrew text of Exod. xvi. 33 the material of which the former vessel was made is not mentioned, but the tradition that it was of gold can be traced at least as far back as the LXX of that verse. The manna incident occurred before the construction of the ark, and the pot containing it is to be 'laid up before the Yahweh, to be preserved in perpetuity.' Similarly Aaron's rod[1] is to be 'laid up before the testimony.' In each case the assumption that these things were put actually in the ark is an unwarrantable deduction from the language of the Old Testament—and here the LXX fairly represents the Hebrew text. We have also in 2 Chron. v. 10—a passage which, though comparatively late, is yet some centuries earlier than Hebrews—the definite tradition that there was nothing in the ark except the two tables of stone, and we may take it for granted that this was the normal view.

Two other items are noted, **the cherubims** and **the mercy seat.** We are quite uncertain as to the exact shape of the former; the only fact that seems to be beyond dispute is that they were composite beings with wings. We have in Ezek. i. an elaborate description of cherubim seen by the prophet in one of his visions, and here they are the bearers of the throne of Yahweh. But there is no reason to believe that Ezekiel had actually seen the ark and its attendants, and his account of these creatures does not wholly agree with the picture suggested by the other references. The cherubim of the Temple, for instance, seem to have had each a single pair of wings, while Ezekiel's creatures were endowed with four apiece.[2] We need not doubt that they had a place in the

[1] Num. xvii. 10.

[2] It may be as well here to make a general remark as to the nature of the tradition on which the writer was relying. It may be assumed that the account of the Tabernacle and its furniture given in Exod. xxv. ff. is derived from P, and is, therefore, comparatively late, at least in its present form. It seems to be an attempt to carry back into the period of the wanderings the general paraphernalia of worship as known in the pre-exilic Temple, and can hardly be regarded as reliable evidence for the Mosaic age itself. The compilers of P evidently aimed at giving Israel, in its earliest days, a portable Temple which should differ from that of Solomon only in being of half the dimensions and in being constructed of materials which could be carried from place to place. But

mythology of the nearer East, and they may be traced back to Mesopotamian sources. Their original form may have been something like that of the winged bulls and lions which are so often found at the gates of Mesopotamian cities and palaces. But Palestinian art in the tenth century B.C. was derived, not directly from Mesopotamia, but through Phoenicia, and in Phoenicia we have to allow for an admixture of *motifs* from many sources, including Egypt and the Aegean civilization as well as the further East. It thus becomes practically impossible even to conjecture the precise form which the cherubim took in Solomon's Temple.

The other detail mentioned is **the mercy seat.** The Greek term used means properly ' place of propitiation.' It occurs only here and in Rom. iii. 25 in the New Testament, but is used regularly in the LXX to translate the Hebrew term *kapporeth.* The latter word means properly no more than a ' covering ' or ' lid,' but is especially applied to the lid of the ark. It is interesting to note how the Greek translators read into the Hebrew word a religious significance, and contemplated, not so much the object itself, as its function and place in religion. The box (that is all that the word ' ark ' means) was in primitive times held to be the actual dwelling-place of Yahweh, and was always kept closed. But Yahweh could be reached by anything placed upon the lid ; it was as near as human gifts could possibly get to Him. It was thus, *par excellence,* the spot on which atonement must finally be made, and the effects of sin eliminated. For ordinary purposes the altar outside the Temple would serve, but on the holiest occasion of all it must be the ark itself—and, in particular, its lid—which was the scene of the vital reunion between man and God. The term is well explained by the rendering **mercy seat,** though it has no philological connexion with the word originally used.

we are concerned primarily, not with the actual historical and archaeological question, but with the opinions and theories of our author, and it is clear that he accepted the *ipsissima verba* of the Law.

Such were the arrangements for worship. The priests con- 6
stantly enter the first tent, in the discharge of their ritual
duties, but the second tent is entered only once a year 7
by the high priest alone—and it must not be without
blood, which he presents on behalf of himself and the
errors of the People. By this the holy Spirit means that 8
the way into the Holiest Presence was not disclosed so long
as the first tent (which foreshadowed the present age) was 9
still standing, with its offerings of gifts and sacrifices which
cannot possibly make the conscience of the worshipper
perfect, since they relate merely to food and drink and a 10
variety of ablutions—outward regulations for the body, that
only hold till the period of the New Order.

Having given, in summary form, an account of the furniture of the old Tabernacle, as he conceived it to have been, the writer now passes on to consider the use made of this establishment, especially on the Day of Atonement, in order that he may compare with it the work of Jesus. He first draws the contrast between the two parts of the sanctuary, remarking that the outer portion, the **first tent,** or Holy Place, was accessible daily and might be entered by all the priests **in the discharge of their ritual duties.** Indeed, the daily offerings could not have been duly carried out unless the priests had had access to this part of the Tabernacle (or Temple), for the ritual demanded the daily application of sacrificial blood to the 'altar of incense' and the regular preparation of the lamp. The inner court, however, **could be entered only once a year,** and that **by the high priest alone,** the occasion being, of course, the Day of Atonement.

As far as we can gather, this special ceremonial did not appear in Israelite Law and custom until after the Exile. There is no reference to it in any document which we can with certainty ascribe to the pre-exilic period, though Ezekiel knows of a ritual of atonement occurring twice a year. This, however, is not so much a means of eliminating the sins of the people, as of purifying the Temple itself from any pollution

which it might have contracted during the preceding six months,[1] though mention is also made of 'every one that erreth' in speaking of the second purification. But we can well understand that a growing sense of sin and of a need for absolute rightness with God led men to feel that it was not enough simply to cleanse the sacred building, but that there remained still something of supreme importance to be done for the people as a whole.

We have here an interesting and valuable light on the growing realization of the inadequacy of the ordinary means of securing a restoration of proper relations with God. The day and its ritual were no substitute for the familiar methods whereby men circumvented their own sin. Whenever a man was conscious of wrongdoing, whether it were ritual or moral, he must express his own penitence and make the sacrifices necessary for his own personal reinstatement. This had long been recognized, and had been held to be adequate in earlier days. But as time passed, it was felt that it was not enough. Men did not, as a matter of fact, find that the ancient sin-offering gave them the sense of peace with God, and they knew that something more was required. There were, further, countless sins of omission and of commission, of which the sinners themselves were unconscious, and these must necessarily constitute a barrier between the worshipper and Yahweh. In accordance with the prevalent belief in the solidarity of the nation, in its 'corporate personality,' such unconscious sin affected and polluted, not only the actual wrongdoer, but also the people as a whole, and some means must be found for escaping the consequences of this unintentional defilement. For the time an attempt was made to meet this double need by the institution of the Day of Atonement, and it became what it still is, the most solemn occasion in the whole of the ecclesiastical calendar. It has several features which mark it off clearly from all other sacred functions. The treatment of the 'scapegoat' is, doubtless, a very ancient piece of ceremonial which had possibly survived elsewhere and was absorbed into the rest. This was the one day on which a fast

[1] Cp. Ezek. xlv. 18, 20, following the reading of the LXX in the latter verse.

was definitely prescribed by the Law,[1] though it is clear from a number of references that fasting was often practised at other times. And, to note the point on which the author of Hebrews especially fixes, this was the only time at which the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, could be entered. This special ritual corresponds to its peculiar value, for this was the day on which the last vestige of Israel's sins during the past twelve months was wiped out, and the whole community could make a fresh start. To use a familiar Christian phrase, the nation was now ' in a state of grace.'

As a matter of fact, the high priest had to enter the Holy of Holies twice on the Day of Atonement. On the former occasion he had to take with him the blood of a bull which was used to make atonement for himself and ' his house,' i.e. all the priests. He, like the rest of the people, suffered from pollution, and he was unfit to make atonement for the sins of the rest until he himself had been cleansed of it. The second time, he carried the blood of a goat, with which he performed the ritual which restored the broken covenant, by sprinkling the blood seven times upon the lid of the ark—the ' mercy-seat.' But, since both these acts were a part of the same annual ceremonial, the writer of Hebrews is justified in saying **the second tent is entered only once a year.** And the high priest certainly went always alone.

On both occasions on which the high priest made his entry into the Holy of Holies, he carried blood with him, and this is a feature on which the writer at once fastens, since it is of profound importance to the development of his argument. Moreover, as has already been suggested, the purpose of the ritual was primarily to make atonement for the **errors of the People,** the word used (though in popular speech it might cover a wider range) calling special attention to sins committed inadvertently, or sins of which the doer was himself unaware. One of the principles recognized by rabbinic tradition was that the ritual of the day was unavailing for the man who sinned

[1] The ritual is described in detail in Lev. xvi., and is still further elaborated in the Mishnah tractate *Yoma*.

deliberately in the hope that he could share in the general purification—' If any says, " I will sin and repent, I will sin and repent," to him God grants no occasion to repent. If he says, " I will sin, and the Day shall atone," the Day will not atone for him.'[1]

In all this the writer sees the expression of a divine purpose. The holy Spirit has drawn a contrast between the two dispensations, the old and the new. The former simply foreshadowed the present age; it was a ' parable,' an acted metaphor, a symbol of the better order which Jesus introduced. There were two directions especially in which it was deficient. In the first place it restricted the sinner's efforts to secure restoration. If there is to be any genuine renewal of the true relationship between man and God, the first necessity is that the penitent should have free access to the Deity whom he has wronged. God must be within easy reach of men. But this ritual, especially the closing of the inner shrine to all but the high priest, set up a barrier which the ordinary man could not pass. For him to attempt to do so would be disastrous, and his presumption would instantly be punished by death. Even the high priest could enter the Holiest Presence but once a year, and then only with the most elaborate precautions against the danger of incurring the divine wrath. As long as the first tent was still standing, the path to God was barricaded, and the door which led to His ' mercy-seat ' was shut. The sinner could not even reach the God with whom he sought to be reconciled.

The second weakness was one on which we have already touched. Such a ritual as that of the Day of Atonement might have a value and a function in relieving men of certain types of guilt. The old Law contained two quite distinct types of regulation, though it is only fair to recognize the fact that the distinction was not realized till comparatively late in the spiritual history of Israel. On the one hand it contained prescriptions of ceremonial cleanness, lists of kinds of food which might be eaten, regulations for the physical purification of men and things—outward regulations, which relate merely to food

[1] Mishnah, *Yoma*, viii. 9.

and drink and a variety of ablutions. (It is true that references to beverages do not appear in the Law, but the writer seems to have added them as being inseparably linked up with the rules for food.) On the other hand, there are real moral offences, condemned not merely on ecclesiastical grounds, but by the universal conscience of mankind. The growth and wide spread of ethical principles is one of the unexplained facts of human life. Wherever man develops his thinking capacity and evolves a social order, sooner or later he comes to recognize an ideal standard of character and of conduct. Not only so, but comparative study of the subject shows a very high degree of similarity between the ideals of different peoples in different ages, even when there is no trace of any historical connexion between them. Generally speaking, the same type of person would have been approved by Confucius, Buddha, the Stoics and the Pharisees. The identity in ideals goes deeper than conduct, and it is not enough to say that social organizations, similarly developing in different countries and ages, produced independently similar standards of conduct. The model character in all is much the same, and it is difficult to avoid the feeling that there is an inevitable and absolute standard which thoughtful and intelligent men will, sooner or later, discover for themselves. Of all the ancient religious systems, however, Judaism was the only one which succeeded in finding a place for the moral standard, and in connecting intimately the conceptions of God and goodness. Other ethical teachers were implicitly (Buddha explicitly) atheistic, but in Judaism vice was also sin. Even where another human being was injured, the more serious sufferer was God. Still more, the religious ideal of the higher Judaism, based as it was on a historic covenant, demanded a moral fitness in man for genuine ethical union with God, and a violation of the moral law made this for the time impossible.

Now the failure to observe ritual prescriptions or ceremonial ordinances may quite well be met by a sacrificial system. The sin and the method of atonement are, as it were, in the same range of fact and in the same area of experience. But, in the nature of the case, moral offences cannot so be expiated.

Where it is necessary to establish or to restore an ethical relationship, a ceremonial is quite inadequate, since it can never be more than a physical thing—**outward regulations for the body.** The demand for an inward penitence is fully recognized in the Old Testament, and, more than once, we have expressed the sense of failure to achieve it by sacrificial methods.

It is here that the writer feels that the old order has most seriously broken down. Indeed, it was never intended to meet the need for a valid moral reunion between man and God. It was a temporary expedient, which had to serve the purpose as best it could until the world as a whole was ripe for the full revelation of God's nature and plans. These **outward regulations for the body . . . only hold till the period of the New Order.** They were imposed only for a limited time, with the full consciousness that they could never be of permanent validity, and that their place must be taken in due course by some other dispensation which would meet the deepest human needs. There must be a ' reconstruction ' of religion, a thorough and critical overhauling of the whole subject, an elimination of the temporary and unessential, a correction of the faulty and erroneous. The world's faith must be ' put straight,' and it is the writer's task to show that this result was achieved, once and for all, in the life and death of Jesus. The legalistic argument, the antiquated dialectic, may have little meaning for us to-day, but the central thought is still profoundly valid, that it was only in Jesus that man's deepest spiritual needs could be met.

11 But when Christ arrived as the high priest of the bliss that was to be, He passed through the greater and more perfect tent which no hands had made (no part, that is to say, of the
12 present order), not taking any blood of goats and oxen but His own blood, and entered once for all into the Holy place.
13 He secured an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkled on defiled persons, give them a holiness that bears on bodily

purity, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who in 14
the spirit of the eternal offered Himself as an unblemished sacrifice to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve a living God ?

Now come the comparison and the contrast. We may remind ourselves that there are two special ways in which the old arrangements represented a permanently valid principle ; these are (i.) the passage into the inner Holy of Holies, the entry into the Presence, the immediate access to God ; (ii.) the necessity for bloodshed as a medium of purification. This last is not elaborated ; it is taken for granted, but we shall have in the next paragraph a suggestion as to the feeling—perhaps only half-conscious—which seems to have dominated the writer's mind. There are also two main points of weakness in the passing order, (i.) the necessity for the constant repetition of the ceremonial, showing that its effect was not really that which was required ; (ii.) the merely external nature of the purification achieved, proving its hopeless inadequacy to secure a valid moral reunion between man and God.

These are the points on which the writer now briefly touches. **Christ** has **arrived,** making His appearance on the stage of material history at the duly prepared season. He, like the long series of His prototypes, is a **high priest,** a point which has already been adequately demonstrated, and, therefore, it is His function to enter into the centre and heart of the place where God dwells. But this is no longer a **tent . . . which . . . hands** have **made.** It is no artificial or artistic product of human skill and toil, fashioned from concrete materials such as wood and stone, and so belonging to **the present order** of physical creation. It is a **greater and more perfect tent,** the heavenly and spiritual **pattern** of which the earthly and physical Tabernacle and Temple were but faint and imperfect copies. Jesus has passed into the true presence of the eternal Father, and the atonement which He achieves is not subject to the limitations of time and matter. So He has become the **high priest,** not merely of **the bliss that is to be,** but of that

which *is* [1] and, even if it did not exist ideally from all eternity, yet came into being with the death of Jesus.

In another respect the old dispensation was a foreshadowing of the new, and that is in the necessity for blood as a medium of atonement. We have here no discussion as to the reason why this should be indispensable, for the writer simply assumes it as one of the basic facts of religion. Blood is a mysterious fluid, and is intimately associated with the yet more mysterious essence which we call life. To the primitive mind it has always had a peculiar significance and a unique efficacy, apart from any conscious theory of the way in which it produces its results. We have, it is true, in the verses which follow this, an indirect reference, or rather a hint, of the explanation which might have been given if the question had been pressed, but neither the writer nor his readers would feel the need for the demonstration of a truth which to them was axiomatic. This condition also was fulfilled by Jesus, but not as it was fulfilled under the old Law. For that prescribed the **blood of goats and oxen,** and, in special circumstances (for the reinstatement of a person who had contracted defilement through contact with a corpse), **the ashes of a heifer,**[2] while the medium used by Jesus was **His own blood.** Now we can understand what was in the writer's mind when he said [3] that even Christ **must have something to offer.** The parallel goes further still, for, just as the victim whose blood secured **a holiness that bears on bodily purity**—the physical, external, ceremonial cleanness—must be physically **unblemished,** so Jesus Himself is free from any spiritual and moral fault, and so fulfils, in that sphere in which He works, the conditions adumbrated in the old regulations.

So Jesus has achieved the purpose for which He came into the world. Just as a material purification had been attained by the means laid down under the old Covenant, now Christ, **in the spirit of the eternal,** has won for mankind a cleansing of the **conscience from dead works.** He has not employed an

[1] The difference is one of reading in the Greek text, and, while recognizing the weight of the evidence on the other side, and the authority of the scholars who accept the text represented in the translation printed above, I cannot but feel that the reading I have preferred is the more likely to have been original.

[2] Cp. Num. xix. 1–13. [3] viii. 3.

external medium, such as **the blood of bulls and goats,** but has freely given Himself. Thus He can offer, not merely the outward purity which might also be obtained from the physical media of material sacrifice, but that inward, ethical, spiritual lustration which alone could be fully and permanently valid. Without the atonement of the Day, Israel could not have continued to be the covenant people of God, and so could not enter His presence and **serve** Him. But now, in spite of their **dead works,** their 'sins without number, and reason, and name,' **the blood of Christ** has made it possible for men to **serve a living God.** Thus **He** has **secured an eternal redemption.**

He mediates a new covenant for this reason, that those who 15
have been called may obtain the eternal inheritance they
have been promised, now that a death has occurred which
redeems them from the transgressions involved in the first
covenant. Thus, in the case of a will, the death of the 16
testator must be announced. A will only holds in cases 17
of death ; it is never valid so long as the testator is alive.
Hence even the first covenant of God's will was not 18
inaugurated apart from blood ; for after Moses had 19
announced every command in the Law to all the people,
he took the blood of calves and goats, together with water,
scarlet wool and hyssop, sprinkling the book and all the
people, and saying, *This is the blood of that covenant which* 20
is God's command for you. **He even sprinkled with blood** 21
the tent and all the utensils of worship in the same way.
In fact, one might almost say that by Law everything is 22
cleansed with blood. No blood shed, no remission of sins !

Rightly to understand this paragraph, it must be realized that, in the Greek of the writer's day, the same word was used for a 'covenant' and for a 'will' or 'testamentary disposition.' Both senses are involved, with the result that for English readers, who have no common term to apply to the two ideas, it is necessary to be careful to distinguish between them. How far the author himself was conscious of this double meaning, we cannot say, but we have elsewhere had occasion

to notice a certain laxity of expression, and, possibly, a tendency to telescope ideas into one another. It may be that the 'testamentary' significance of the ambiguous term was more or less accidentally brought to his mind by his use of the word **inheritance** in verse 15. This has occurred before (e.g. in i. 14), in the sense of 'possession,' without special reference to entering into occupation of a dead man's estate, but the technical flavour could never have been wholly lost, and, since the whole subject before us is the effect and result of a death, it is not unnatural that this aspect of the term should rise to the surface of his mind and lead him to develop the idea.

It is clear that this latter is the intrusive conception, and that verses 16f. must be regarded as parenthetic to the main argument. They are couched in technical legal language, and form an appeal to the familiar principle *nemo est viventis heres*. The very conception of a 'will' involves **the death of the testator**; in the nature of the case it cannot be 'proved' while its maker is still alive. He may change his mind and make other dispositions, and in that case the original legatees cease to be even 'heirs-apparent.' It can come into force only when the former owner of the property is dead. The metaphor must not be pressed too closely in the present instance. Jesus had something of profound value to give the world, but it was not in any sense a possession which He could transmit to His heirs. It was, as a matter of fact, something which came into existence only with His death. Nevertheless, that death was necessary to it, and, still more, to its realization by those for whom it was intended. To this extent, and no further, the parallel holds good.

The main theme of the passage, however, is more pertinent to the general argument, and has an important bearing on Christian theology. It is inevitably connected in the mind of the reader with the utterance of Jesus Himself at the Last Supper (though, curiously enough, the Supper is never mentioned in this Epistle)—'This is my blood of the Covenant which is shed for many,'[1] and must be traced to the same cycle of ideas. The subject is the relation of the death of

[1] Mark xiv. 24.

Jesus to the Covenant, and it is clear that the writer is thinking throughout of the great passage he has already quoted[1] from Jer. xxxi.

We have had occasion to observe that the *differentia* of the religion of Israel, even in its most primitive form, lay in the fact that the relation between Yahweh and Israel was based on and dependent on a covenant. As long as its terms were observed, it stood, and the nation remained in its proper position with regard to its God. But any breach of the agreement naturally invalidated the whole, and it became necessary to restore it if it was not to lapse altogether. Atonement, in Israel, meant not simply the propitiation of an angry Deity, but the renewal of the ideal relationship implied and involved in the Covenant. If the people as a whole sinned, there must be a general renewal. If an individual sinned, he remained outside the scope of the Covenant, i.e. he ceased to be a member of the religious community of Israel, until he himself had been through some ritual which implied the restoration of the Covenant in his case. We shall not properly understand some of the writer's references unless we keep this general fact in view, for he mentions among the rites cited some which do not appear in the Covenant ceremonial proper.

Two forms of Covenant ritual are preserved for us in the Old Testament, the one being in the account of the Covenant made between Yahweh and Abraham (Gen. xv.) and the other the great Covenant which introduced Yahweh and Israel to one another, and so formed the national and religious foundation of Israel. In the former case a victim is slain and cut in two, the parts being placed upon the ground with a space between them. Then the parties to the Covenant (Yahweh appears in the form of fire) walk between the pieces. The symbolism is obvious. The problem has been to unite two entities which have hitherto been separate and independent of one another. This can be done only by uniting them both to a third party. Its life has been taken, and is available for the purpose. As each of the two participants passes through the body of the victim, he makes himself one with it. He has

[1] viii. 8–12.

entered into it, and when he emerges he carries its identity in himself. Thus, when both have performed the same rite, they are to be accounted as a single entity for the purposes of the Covenant, and as long as its expressed terms are observed. They are no longer two, and are not merely contiguous with one another; they are, so to speak, one and the same, and the life which both have shared is continuous between them.

The other Covenant ritual is different in form but has a similar purpose. The story is told in Exod. xxiv. 4–8. Stripped of later accretions, it seems to have run in its original shape something as follows: An altar is set up, representing Yahweh, and over against it stand the people. Victims are slain, and their blood is drained off into bowls. Half of this is dashed upon the altar, and Moses then reads the terms of the Covenant. On their acceptance by the people, the remainder of the blood is flung over the heads of the multitude, and the ceremony is complete. Here again the symbolism is fairly clear. Once more the problem is the union of two separate parties, and once more this can be achieved only by uniting each to a third, whose life must be taken from it to be made available for the purpose. That life, that vital principle and essence, is inherent in the blood which has now been thrown over both the parties, and has thus included them in a common whole. Each has been covered by it, and each, therefore, has a share in it and may be identified with the animal from which it has been taken.

Now in all the forms of sacrifice prescribed in the early chapters of Leviticus, it is to be noted that the dashing of the blood upon the altar was an invariable feature. In most of the types of sacrifice there were other elements as well, but this is surely a reminiscence of the great Covenant which had inaugurated Israel's political and spiritual life. It indicates that, while a particular sacrifice might (and usually did) have other aspects and other functions, it certainly implied the renewal of the Covenant relation. In two instances, those of the consecration of the priests and of the readmission of the leper to the community, the blood was applied also to the man concerned,

thus making the Covenant element the more conspicuous, but it cannot be overlooked in all the others.

It is to be noted that the Covenant victim was not a sacrifice in the sense that it was necessarily offered to any deity. Its function was to **mediate,** to be the intervening third in whom the two parties should find their ultimate unity. And when the writer thinks of Jesus as being the victim required for the ratification of the **new covenant,** he does not suggest that He was the price paid, or that He paid a price. What he does imply is very much what Jesus Himself indicated at the Last Supper. God and man stand apart from one another, separated from their ideal unity by the fact of human sin. If they are to be brought together in a moral union, there must be a third, whose life shall be given, in whose life-blood both can be absorbed. In virtue of His double character, as Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus alone is in a position to satisfy the demands of the situation and make the aim of the highest religious effort an attainable possibility.

It goes without saying that there must have been a sense of the reality and of the awful power of sin, for otherwise there would have been no need for the renewal of the Covenant at all. Once ratified, with its terms unbroken, it would have endured as long as man and God existed, but when its provisions had been violated—as they constantly were on the human side—the demand for a restoration became imperative. Hence the repeated sacrifices of the old Law, all of which ideally required the blood of a victim, though the regulations were modified to suit the needs of those who were prevented by poverty from offering an animal. No regulation could be allowed to put any man beyond the range of pardon and restoration. The writer has not forgotten this detail, for he is careful to remark, **' one might *almost* say that by Law everything is cleansed by blood.'** Nevertheless he is right in insisting that the rule is as nearly absolute as it can be in an imperfect world, and that the essence of the restitution formulae lay in the shed blood of the victim.

One other point may be noted before we touch upon some of the details cited by the author. It might be asked, How

does this **new covenant** affect those who have sinned under the old ? If it be admitted that their sacrifice could not cleanse their conscience, their sin still remains, and they are yet in danger of being deprived of **the eternal inheritance they have been promised.** The answer is that the **new covenant** is greater than the **first,** that the greater includes the less, and, therefore, all sins and sinfulness yet outstanding under the old dispensation will be equally eliminated under the new.

When he comes to details, the writer, while professing to give an account of the original Covenant at Sinai, introduces a number of points which find no place in the record of Exod. xxiv. **Goats, water, scarlet wool, hyssop**—these are not mentioned. Nor is the **book** sprinkled ; it is merely read in the hearing of the people. In the nature of the case the similar treatment accorded to the **tent and all the utensils of worship** has nothing to do with the original ceremonial, for these things were not yet in existence. But to some extent the author is justified by a consideration which has already been noted. The conception of a covenant relation was not confined to the great inaugural ceremony, it was continued and ran through all the ceremonial of sacrifice in Israel. In a sense he sees that all atoning practices were a part of the Covenant ritual, if not in its earliest form, then at least in its continued developments. And he is certainly right when he insists that the all but universal Law was, **No blood shed, no remission of sins.**

In Jesus, then, the writer sees Him who alone could act as the mediator of the **new covenant.** It is as if he had recognized the truth of the principle laid down by Jeremiah, and had been prepared to accept it as the guiding rule of atonement. No covenant could be valid with men, unless its **laws** were **set within their mind,** and inscribed **upon their hearts.** But there was one indispensable factor in the situation which Jeremiah had not—could not have—foreseen, and that was the medium by which the Covenant could be ratified. The Law might be written with the stylus upon clay or wax, or carved with the chisel upon stone, but such external methods

were all futile when men's hearts were concerned. Blood shed, life taken, personality surrendered—these things alone would stamp permanently the divine Law upon the human heart and conscience. Nor was it any common blood that was demanded. That of the sacrificial animals had long since proved its worthlessness ; the one effective medium was the precious blood of Christ.

Now, while the copies of the heavenly things had to be cleansed 23
with sacrifices like these, the heavenly things themselves
required nobler sacrifices. For Christ has not entered a 24
holy place which human hands have made (a mere type
of the reality!) ; He has entered heaven itself, now to
appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it 25
to offer Himself repeatedly, like the high priest entering
the holy place every year with blood that was not his
own :—for in that case He would have had to suffer 26
repeatedly, ever since the world was founded. Nay, once
for all, at the end of the world, He has appeared with His
self-sacrifice to abolish sin. And just as it is appointed 27
for men to die once and after that to be judged, so Christ, 28
after being once sacrificed to bear the sins of many, will
appear again, not to deal with sin but for the saving of
those who look out for Him.

The writer now sums up the comparison which he has been making between the high priests under the old Covenant and Jesus as the eternal mediator. Once more there rises to the surface his doctrine of the two worlds, on the one hand the real, the spiritual, the heavenly, and on the other the unreal, the material, the earthly. For the former the sacrifice of animals would suffice, and would secure an outward purification both of the sanctuary and of the worshippers. But this **holy place which human hands have made is a mere type of the reality.** It is nothing more than a copy of the eternal pattern, and a valid atonement can be secured only in the realm of the eternal. We must not press the writer too closely here. His language sounds as though he thought that

the heavenly Temple needed purification just as the earthly Tabernacle did, but this can hardly have been his meaning. What he does wish his readers to understand is that there is need for purification in the spiritual realm, and a greater need than in the physical. Just as the Jewish high priest entered the earthly Temple, the one spot in which God might be met face to face, so Jesus has **entered heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.**

The other points on which the writer here fastens are not resemblances but contrasts. The high priest used as his medium for purification the blood of an animal—**blood that was not his own.** It would have been impossible for him to have made the complete reunion of man and God in himself, for he had not the necessary qualifications. But Jesus, having those qualifications, came with His own blood—**His own self-sacrifice,** and, just because the atonement cost Him all that He had to give, it proved valid and efficacious in the highest sense.

One other contrast appears. The writer has more than once called attention to the fact that the ritual of the Day of Atonement had to be repeated **every year.** Like other Christians of his generation, he clearly felt that the age was drawing to a close, and that time was nearly at an end. One of the strongest convictions held by the early Church was the proximity of the final coming of the Lord ; it is impossible to understand its attitude towards many questions unless we take its eschatology into account. To them the death of Jesus was the consummation of human history, and it seemed almost as if there were nothing left for God to do to the world, except to give men an opportunity of believing on the Christ. That done to the extent to which God willed it, the world would end. So the author does not contemplate even the theoretical possibility that Jesus might again have to enter the world in order to be crucified afresh for the sins of men. He looks to the past, and points out that what has happened has happened but once, and that, therefore, the offering made by Jesus was permanently valid. In distinction to the annual offering of the high priest, made **repeatedly,** Jesus had

suffered once for all, and had, thereby, set the crown on all human spiritual experience.

Now we are led to another thought, again springing out of the belief of the early Church, though it has little bearing on the argument. Like Jesus, every man must die once. But that does not end man's connexion with Christ. After death comes the judgement, and it was this belief, more than any other, which gave to the Jew and to the Christian alike the sense of the terror of death. But the work of Jesus will still continue, though it will be of a different kind. When first He came, it was that He might be **sacrificed to bear the sins of many.** There can be no question of sin, even in the day of judgement, for those who **look out for Him,** those who have accepted the salvation He has wrought for them. Yet they will need Him, and will find their salvation in Him, for it is He who must attest their freedom from defilement and claim them as His own. So, in an hour of need yet greater than that of death itself, He **will appear again for the saving of those who look out for Him.**

X.

For as the Law has a mere shadow of the bliss that is to be, instead of representing the reality of that bliss, it never can perfect those who draw near with the same annual sacrifices that are perpetually offered. Otherwise, they would surely have ceased to be offered ; for the worshippers, once cleansed, would no longer be conscious of sins ! As it is, they are an annual reminder of sins (for the blood of bulls and goats cannot possibly remove sins !).

1 2 3–4

Yet once more the author reiterates certain principles which he recognizes as fundamental to any true appreciation of the place of Jesus in human religion. The first is the Platonic doctrine of the two worlds, the ideal and the phenomenal, the real and the unreal, the heavenly and the earthly. It is with the latter that the Law must be classed, for it could offer men no more than a **shadow of the bliss that is to be** ; absolute **reality** lies in the other sphere. Belonging, as it

does, to that which is inevitably ephemeral, it can have no effective bearing on that which is eternal, and by the very fact that it prescribes **annual sacrifices that are perpetually offered,** it confesses its inability to make **perfect** men who offer them. For, if a sinful people had once been made **perfect,** there would no longer be any need for a fresh atonement to be made. When sin is once truly cleansed, and the barrier between man and God effectively removed, the human conscience has no longer any need either to stand aloof from God or to seek artificial means of entering into His presence. Sacrifice, therefore, **would surely have ceased to be offered.**

As a matter of fact, the only result of this annual offering is to keep the sense of sinfulness alive. The writer clearly feels that, when men have been really forgiven and brought into right relations with God, the weight on the conscience is removed, and the thoughts and heart can turn to further progress in the spiritual life. But, since they had to have their sins wiped out every year, the Jews under the old Covenant could never get beyond what should have been a merely initial stage. An atonement that needs constant repetition does not really atone; a conscience which has to be cleansed once a year has never been truly cleansed. It is as if some spiritual weed, instead of being pulled up, had merely had its upper parts cut off, and continued to send its roots deeper into the ground, while it sprouted afresh with every spring.

This brings the author to his clear and bold statement, a statement based both on logic and experience, that **the blood of bulls and goats cannot possibly remove sin.** We need dwell no longer on this point; it has been before us already. It is enough to note how the writer returns to it, and how he feels that, whether his dialectic leads him to this conclusion or not, this is the supreme condemnation of the old Law. The means which it prescribed for achieving the religious ideal were, in the last resort, futile. They might give a temporary result, but could have no permanent effect for the better, and their only value lay in their testimony to the need for

> A sacrifice of nobler name,
> And richer blood than they.

Hence, on entering the world He says, 5
Thou hast no desire for sacrifice or offering;
it is a body Thou hast prepared for Me—
in holocausts and sin-offerings Thou takest no delight. 6
So I said, 'Here I come—in the roll of the book this 7
is written of Me—
I come to do Thy will, O God.'
He begins by saying, *Thou hast no desire for, Thou takest* 8
no delight in, sacrifice and offerings and holocausts and sin-offerings **(and these are what are offered in terms of the Law); He then adds,** *Here I come to do Thy will.* 9
He does away with the first in order to establish the second.
And it is by this *will* **that we are consecrated, because Jesus** 10
Christ once for all has *offered* **up His** *body*.

The argument is now practically concluded, reaching its consummation in ch. ix. and in the first few verses of ch. x. But it will have been noted that, throughout this passage, there has been hardly any reference to the Old Testament. Its language has been occasionally employed,[1] but there has been none of the appeal to it for proof-texts which we have learnt to regard as characteristic of this book. It almost seems as if the author, having reached the end of his formal argument, had suddenly become conscious of the fact that he had failed to support either his premisses or his conclusions by reference to Scripture. It is true that he has taken as the basis of his reasoning the principle expressed in the great Covenant passage in Jer. xxxi., but his use of this has been very different from the methods which he has employed in dealing with other texts. In particular the last splendid statement as to the inefficacy of animal sacrifice has been left without scriptural warrant, and he now proceeds—almost as an afterthought—to make good the deficiency.

The passage which he selects for the purpose is taken from Ps. xl. There are others in the same book (e.g. in Pss. l., li.) which would have served to illustrate the principle, and he

[1] e.g. in ix. 20, 28.

might have had recourse to some of the great prophetic condemnations of sacrifice. But he did not wish to denounce it as thoroughly as Amos and Isaiah had done ; his point rather is that, while it might be justified as a temporary expedient, it could never have claimed a permanent value. And the quotation actually chosen is selected, probably, because it not merely illustrates the uselessness of sacrifice, but indicates a more satisfactory means whereby the favour of God might be recovered. It is not enough for him to pull down ; he must also build up ; his aim is positive, and not merely negative.

Psalm xl. is a hymn of thanksgiving, perhaps designed for use in some special service of gratitude, or, like Ps. cxvi., in the fulfilment of a vow. But the author feels himself entitled to adapt it to his own purposes, and to assume that the speaker is the eternal Son, addressing God before His descent into the world. He might have found it less suitable if he had known the Hebrew text instead of the LXX, for one of the key-words is certainly *body*, and the original has 'ears.'[1] Nor is it certain that the preceding Hebrew verb can mean *prepared*, even if the text be original. The line seems rather to imply that, though God has *no desire for sacrifice or offering*, the worshipper can yet satisfy Him by turning an obedient ear to His commands. This would fit the rest of the passage, and may be taken as the psalmist's real meaning.

But, though the form in which the quotation occurs here may not fairly represent the original in this detail, it does serve as eloquent testimony to the view, current especially in prophetic circles, that the supreme demand of God was not for sacrifice but for obedience, and, in particular, for obedience to the moral law. In their enthusiasm for righteousness, the nobler spirits, even in pre-exilic Israel, had realized that men were in the habit of making religiosity a substitute for upright conduct, and, with deep insight into the character of Israel's God, had denounced the whole institution of sacrifice as dangerous and even impious. Their doctrine, though somewhat

[1] The discrepancy seems to be due to early transcriptional error in the LXX itself, which probably had in the first instance a rendering of the Hebrew text still current.

obscured by the legal passion of post-exilic Israel, never died, and it is interesting to see how, from time to time, it found expression in such passages as this which is immediately before us. In affirming the uselessness of sacrifice as a means of securing the divine favour, the writer is amply justified by his appeal to the prophetic spirit in ancient Israel.

But this condemnation of sacrifice is only a preliminary to the statement of a fuller truth. If sacrifice is invalid, there is something that is effective. So **He does away with the first in order to establish the second,** and we then pass at once to the more perfect doctrine. Jesus came **to do the will** of God. The demands of that **will** have already been fully discussed, and we have seen how, **Son though He was, He learned by all He suffered how to obey.**[1] It was the **will** of God that Jesus should live a life subject to all human conditions, and the crown and consummation of His obedience was reached when, in His death, He **once for all . . . *offered* up His *body*.**[2]

We feel that the use made of this quotation is slight, as compared with the argument devoted to some others. But the position has been so well established that extended demonstration from Scripture is unnecessary. Again we suspect that the biblical reference was an afterthought, but it does serve to reinforce the main contention, which is, we may say, that in the Cross of Christ we have God's greatest work on earth.

Again, while every priest* stands daily at his service, offering 11
the same sacrifice repeatedly, sacrifices which never can
take sins away—He offered a single sacrifice for sins and 12
then *seated Himself* for all time *at the right hand of God,* 13
to wait *until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet.*
For by a single offering He has made the sanctified perfect 14

[1] v. 8.

[2] It is not quite certain what the psalmist meant when he said, 'in the roll of the book this is written concerning Me,' though the reference is probably to the Law—perhaps to the Deuteronomic Law. But, since the writer makes no use of this phrase, it is unnecessary to discuss it here.

* Reading *ἱερεὺς* instead of *ἀρχιερεύς*.

15 **for all time. Besides, we have the testimony of the holy Spirit ; for after saying,**

16 *This is the covenant I will make with them when that day comes, saith the Lord,*
I will set My laws upon their hearts,
inscribing them upon their minds,
He adds,

17 *And their sins and breaches of the Law I will remember no more.*

18 **Now where these are remitted, an offering for sin exists no longer.**

It remains for the writer to demonstrate from the Old Testament the all-sufficiency of the single sacrifice of Christ. This he does by reference to two passages which have already been cited, Ps. cx. 1 and Jer. xxxi. 33 f. The former is introduced with some repetition of what has been said elsewhere—**every priest stands daily at his service, offering the same sacrifices repeatedly, sacrifices which can never take away sin.** There may, however, be a fresh emphasis on the **every** and on the **stands.** Each term is intended to bring out the contrast between the old order and the new. Every other who has had laid upon him the function of making atonement between man and God has been called again and again to his task, while Jesus **offered a single sacrifice for sins.** The attitude serves to bring this point out still further. A person **stands** in the East for service or for activity of any kind, and we must not overlook the language of the citation from Ps. cx. 1—***seated Himself.*** To ' sit,' in oriental phraseology, is to be unoccupied, to be quiescent, and the fact that Jesus should have ***seated Himself*** **for all time** ***at the right hand of God,*** not merely implies the supreme honour of His exalted position, but suggests that His task is finished and His work is over. Here is the contrast : the earthly priest **stands** continually to repeat his work each year ; Jesus sits because His duties are accomplished once and for all and He has no need to remain at work. It is clear that this thought is in the writer's mind when he adds, **by a single offering He has made the sanctified perfect for all**

time. To complete the sentence from the psalm the words ***until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet*** are added, but no further use is made of them. There is no mention of the enemies who have to be overcome, and it is clear that the phrase is appended simply to complete the quotation.

The argument is finally clinched by the reference to Jer. xxxi. It is not necessary to repeat the whole passage, since it has already been given in full, and only portions of verses 33 and 34 are cited. But they are sufficient for the writer's purpose. The opening sentences give the conditions of the new **covenant**, as they have previously been interpreted, but the stress is laid on the final clause, **And their sins and breaches of the Law I will remember no more.** We recall inevitably the language of verse 3—**' they,'** i.e. the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, **' are an annual reminder of sins.'** That was the best that the old Covenant could do ; it prevented men from forgetting their sins. The new Covenant, on the contrary, went so far as to enable God to forget them. We could not have had a more expressive statement of the doctrine that the sacrifice of Jesus once and for all eliminated the barrier of sin which human hearts have erected between themselves and God. What God forgets is indeed forgotten, and forgotten so completely that it ceases to be. There is no need to repeat the process by which this has been brought about ; the spiritual weeds have been torn up by the roots and utterly destroyed. So it follows inevitably that **an offering for sin exists no longer.** Here we have the very heart of the Gospel as our author understood it : when Jesus died, sin died also.

Brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy Presence 19
in virtue of the blood of Jesus, by the fresh, living way 20
which He has inaugurated for us through the veil (that is,
through His flesh), and since we have *a great Priest over the* 21
***house of God*, let us draw near with a true heart, in absolute** 22
assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled clean from a bad
conscience, and our bodies washed in pure water ; let us 23
hold the hope we avow without wavering (for we can rely

24 **on Him who gave us the Promise); and let us consider**
25 **how to stir up one another to love and good deeds—not ceasing to meet together, as is the habit of some, but admonishing one another, all the more so, as you see the Day coming near.**

The argument, which has depended on the parallel between Jesus and the Jewish high priest, is now completed, and the writer turns, as he has done before, to practical exhortation. His object has never been mere dialectic, or the simple exposition of doctrine; he has always had in view the edification of his readers, and their advancement in the Christian life. He therefore appends this appeal to his theological discussion, and begs his friends not to lose the privileges that have been won for them.

In verses 19–21 we have a short preamble, which contains a summary of the practical results of what has hitherto been said. The path to the inner heart of God is now open. There had been access of old for the high priest alone through the veil of the Temple on his annual purification ceremony. The evangelists[1] tell us that at the moment when Jesus died, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, and, though he does not seem to have been acquainted with any of our Gospels in their present form, our author here uses the same image. But he goes further, and identifies the **veil** which belongs to the heavenly realm with the body of Jesus. His metaphor must not be pressed too far. He must not be interpreted as implying that the physical frame of Jesus was an actual barrier which hid God from men, though it might be argued that even Jesus could be fully known only after His death. What he does seem to suggest is that it was only when the body of Jesus was torn asunder on the Cross that His life-blood became available for its supreme purpose, the salvation of men.

There has thus been laid open for men a **fresh and living way**, a phrase in which we may venture to see rather more than the *ipsissima verba* would suggest. For it implies, not only that Jesus has opened the way, but that He is Himself

[1] Cp., e.g., Mark xv. 38.

the way.[1] Originally the adjective rendered **fresh** meant 'newly slain,' and, though in common speech the original derivation may have been almost entirely forgotten, we may suspect that it lay at the back of the writer's mind. In any case, man now has free approach to God. Not only so, but **we have a *great Priest over the house of God*** (a composite phrase, the term 'great priest' for 'high priest' occurring in the LXX of Zech. vi. 11, where the Hebrew has the ordinary word, and the rest being, apparently, a reminiscence of the passage already cited from Num. xii. 7). That is to say, we have not only a means whereby we may come to God, but we have, as a permanent possession, Him who made this means available for us. The combination of the **way** and the **Priest** gives us **confidence,** frees us from fear and all other inhibitions, and makes it possible for us to come, as ourselves, into the presence of God.

These considerations form the basis on which the appeal itself is made. It has a threefold aspect, and demands first faith, then hope, then love, each of the three having its own practical application. These all illustrate different sides of the general appeal, **let us draw near with a true heart.** The phrase suggests genuineness and honesty. There must be no doubts and, above all, no attempt at 'posing' in the presence of God. He knows what we are, and if we try to erect any barrier which might hide us from Him, the only effect possible is that He will be hidden from us. We must be simply and frankly ourselves if we would find Him.

The first concomitant of our entry into His presence is the **absolute assurance of faith,** or rather we might say, in full **faith.** Faith itself is to be defined and illustrated later, in the great ch. xi., and all that we have suggested to us in this passage is that it is the result of having **our hearts sprinkled clean from a bad conscience, and our bodies washed in pure water.** It is impossible to escape from the feeling that we are still in the realm of the official high priest and his duties on the Day of Atonement, together with a comparison between the old and the new dispensations. We ought not, however, to carry

[1] Cp. John xiv. 6.

the matter so far as to assume that we have a reference to the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers,[1] the connexion is, as has happened before in this Epistle, somewhat loose. But clearly we have before us that atonement, achieved once and for all by Christ, which has eliminated sin from the hearts of those who have accepted His salvation. The other reference is obviously to baptism, and there may be a reminiscence of the regulation which compelled the high priest to wash himself with care before proceeding to his duties on the Day of Atonement. Perhaps the writer had at the back of his mind also the thought that, while the high priest must perform this lustration every year, the Christian undergoes the rite but once, at the beginning of his life as a member of the Church. But, whatever the exact details, the grounds for faith are adequately stated, they are conversion and baptism.

Next stands the requirement of **hope.** The writer has now nothing to add to what he has already said in the latter part of ch. vi. There is, it is true, a slight modification in the wording, and we realize that **hope** is something that we can **avow** and openly profess. This must be maintained whatever happens, for it was the unfailing God whose **Promise** gave it birth. There may be constant temptations from within and from without, tending to make us cast it on one side, yet we should be so sure of God that, in spite of all appearances and threats, we may hold it **without wavering.**

Love, strangely enough, is a virtue of which we hear comparatively little in this Epistle. It is mentioned in vi. 10 as one of the grounds which the writer has for his belief in the final perseverance of his friends, but, on the whole, no New Testament writer lays less stress on it than does our author. We think of St. Paul as the Apostle of Faith, but it is in 1 Corinthians and not in Hebrews that we have the great panegyric of Love. Yet this writer could not ignore it, and, if we had more of his practical teaching on the relation of members of the Church to one another, we might have heard more of it from him.

Love needs stimulation and society. **Faith** and **hope** can

[1] Cp. 1 Pet. ii. 9, Rev. i. 6, v. 10.

be practised by a solitary, in a hermit's cell or on a desert island. But the exercise of **love** is possible only in a community, for it requires both a spur and an object. Hence the writer urges, in his appeal for love, that his readers shall maintain their common Christian worship. He speaks of **some** who made a **habit** of absenting themselves from the Christian gatherings. We have no clue to the reasons for this. It has been suggested that the readers of the Epistle lived in a large city where there were a number of gatherings, and that, instead of confining themselves to that to which they properly belonged, some of them wandered from one to another. It is more likely that, from fear or weariness, men began to lose their first keenness and interest in the meetings of the little Church. Perhaps they found that attendance at Christian assemblies brought them within reach of the law.

Whatever their reason, the action of these people was fraught with danger to themselves. Christianity is essentially a social religion, and its spirit can be kept alive only in a community. A man may be strong enough (as, perhaps, some of these men thought they were) to withstand attacks and persecution from the outside, but he will rarely have the power to protect his soul against the numbing tendency to drift and to grow careless. There must always be a ' sharing,' whether it be deliberate or only half-conscious. This, to the writer's mind, was the more urgent, because he, like so many others in the early Church, confidently believed that the end of all things was at hand, and that Christ might certainly be expected speedily to return. It would be, to his mind, a terrible thing for the Church to be found scattered, its units isolated, its faith weak, and its witness dim. Yet these things would be the inevitable consequences of slackness on the part of the members ; it was only their communion which could render them fit to meet the **Day** which was **coming near.**

For if we sin deliberately, after receiving the knowledge of the 26
Truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins left, nothing 27
but an awful outlook of doom, of that *burning Wrath* **which**
will *consume the foes* **of God. Anyone who has rejected the** 28

law of Moses *dies* without mercy, *on the evidence of two or*
29 ***of three witnesses.* How much heavier, do you suppose,**
will be the punishment assigned to him who has spurned
the Son of God, who has profaned *the covenant-blood* with
which he was sanctified, who has insulted the Spirit of
30 **grace? We know who said, *Vengeance is Mine, I will***
exact a requital:* and again, *The Lord will pass sentence
31 ***on His people.* It is an awful thing to fall into the hands**
of the living God.

Once again we note the haunting terror which besets our author, lest those whom he loves should fail to attain the prize which seems justly theirs. The thought springs immediately out of the previous paragraph. By dissociating themselves from their fellow-Christians men run the grave risk of forsaking also Christ, and, in accordance with the doctrine that there is no forgiveness for the apostate, the writer sees nothing before them but the final doom.

We are not, however, to assume that this most fearful penalty is to be imposed on ordinary failure, weakness, or even sin. It applies only to cases where men, **after receiving** accurate and detailed **knowledge of the Truth, sin deliberately,** with full intent, taking their previous faith and experience, as it were, in both hands and flinging their bliss from them. There seems to be a special point in the mention of **knowledge of the Truth.** It does not mean simply familiarity with the outstanding dogmas of Christianity, or a mere intellectual grasp of the logical and philosophical principles on which Christian theology is based. Knowledge of the type mentioned here is contrasted with ordinary human knowledge in 1 Cor. xiii. 12, where St. Paul says, '**At present I am learning, bit by bit**'—the common term for 'knowing'—'**but then I shall understand, as all along I have myself been understood**'—knowledge in the higher, spiritual sphere, such as that possessed by God Himself. It is this latter which the Christian wins when he accepts Christ in the full sense of the phrase, and makes the Cross his own.

For the deliberate, intentional, wilful abandonment of this

salvation there is no room for forgiveness. All that is left is **an awful outlook of doom,** the expectation of a frightful punishment; the man's only hope is despair. Christ has been sacrificed once and for all, and as each believer appropriates that sacrifice and enters into the salvation thus offered, Christ is, as it were, sacrificed for him, since the offering then, and then only, becomes an effective reality in his life. But, as the writer has been at some pains to show, Christ suffered but once, and can never suffer again. This principle also must be applied to the case of the individual Christian; he cannot ask that Christ should die twice for him. In language which is coloured by the LXX rendering of Isa. xxvi. 11, the writer describes the **doom** as a **burning Wrath which will consume the foes of God.**

The position is reinforced by an *a fortiori* argument derived from the familiar parallel between the old Covenant and the new. The Day of Atonement availed only for sins of accident or ignorance; he who sinned deliberately, and presumptuously **rejected the law of Moses,** setting it on one side and discarding it, was put to death **without mercy,** since for him there was no appeal, reprieve, or pardon. But under the new Covenant the sin is immeasurably the more heinous. The sacrifice of Christ has availed for the elimination of sin committed in the time of a man's ignorance, before he knew God, but when once he has received **the knowledge of the Truth,** there can be no hope for him. He **has spurned** and trampled under foot the very Son of God, knowing Him to be the Son of God. Under the old régime, ***covenant-blood*** was a holy thing; infinitely more holy is the blood of Christ, yet this man, knowing that it is not merely holy in itself but also that it has made him holy—**sanctified** him—has treated it as though it were the ordinary, secular blood of some animal slain by a common butcher, or of some criminal executed by the officers of profane law, a thing disgusting, foul, and loathsome. He has received the **Spirit of grace**; as a special sign of God's favour the divine **Spirit** has made His dwelling in his heart. In thus ascribing personality to the Holy Spirit, our author is quite in line with the later developments of Jewish theological speculation, for

there is some ground for holding that the Spirit, manifested in the phenomena of prophecy and elsewhere, could be identified with the Wisdom and the Logos of Graeco-Jewish metaphysics. So the **Spirit** has entered into the convert's soul, but has now been expelled with contumely and **insult.**

What, then, can even God do? Two sentences are cited, both appearing in Deut. xxxii. (verses 35, 36), and the latter also in Ps. cxxxv. 14. Each, in its original context, asserts the willingness of God to avenge wrongs done to His people, but, if confronted with this criticism, we may suspect that the writer would have retorted, 'Then how much more shall He not avenge wrongs done to Himself?' It would seem that in such a case God is helpless. If we may use the language of the 'old' theology, to admit such persons to heaven would be a more terrible punishment than sending them to hell. If a man were to insist—with full knowledge (that must always be borne in mind)—on casting God away, then God Himself would be impotent, for He could 'save' such a man only against his will, and that would mean a violation of the law of personality, an inconsistency within the divine nature. If God were to remit the penalty (using the author's own metaphor) in such a case, He would not be God. It is indeed **an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

We may feel that the writer puts the case too strongly. It may seem to us that, no matter how deeply a man has sinned, nor in which circumstances, there is always room for a return. Even one who has denied his Lord may be restored and honoured with an Apostleship. The metaphor of **punishment** and **vengeance** may be the wrong one to apply to the divine heart broken by human sin. Yet it is well that we should realize that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not soft, shallow, or flabby. It *is* a matter of blood and fire, a solemn, and, at times, almost a fierce thing. It is true that it carries with it a 'joy inexpressible and glorified,' but that joy springs out of divine agony, and is commensurate only with its source. Nor dare we lightly assume that the salvation which is offered to us in the Cross of Christ is easily won, or that it entails no responsibilities on the recipient. There is a certain method

of the presentation of the Gospel which has been cynically, but not inaptly, described as 'taking a first-class ticket for Heaven,' and while we claim exultingly that gift of God which is eternal life, we forget at our peril the implications of that life. The writer may not have grasped the implications of the Fatherhood of God, though he has at least helped us to realize the solemn wonder and glory of divine redemption.

Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you 32
endured a hard struggle of suffering, partly by being held 33
up yourselves to obloquy and anguish, partly by making common cause with those who fared in this way ; for 34
you did sympathize with the prisoners, and you took the confiscation of your own belongings cheerfully, conscious that elsewhere you had higher, you had lasting, possessions.
Now do not drop that confidence of yours ; it carries 35
with it a rich hope of reward. Steady patience is what 36
you need, so that after doing the will of God you may get what you have been promised. For *in a little, a very little* 37
now,

The Coming One will arrive without delay.
Meantime my just man shall live on by his faith ; 38
if he shrinks back, my soul takes no delight in him.

We are not the men to shrink back and be lost, but to have 39
faith and so to win our souls.

As once before,[1] the author turns from the terrible possibilities envisaged by his creed to the hope engendered in him by the record of his readers. There has been a time of persecution ; whether it had resulted in the death of any Christians or not, is not clear, though a hint in xii. 4 suggests at least the possibility of bloodshed in the Church. But, when the writer comes to speak of the sufferings of the past, there is no mention of the extreme penalty, and, though he would in any case be addressing survivors, it is not very likely that he would have left out all reference to those who had died a martyr's death.

[1] vi. 9 ff.

The reality of the religious life of these Christians has been shown in two ways. In the first place they have sympathized with, and ministered to, others who were suffering more severely than themselves. Some Christians were imprisoned, and the conditions of the ancient world made it most desirable that such people should not be left without help. It will be remembered that, in the Parable of the Great Arraignment, one of the points on which the verdict turns is whether or not men and women have **visited** those who were **in prison.**[1] (We may suspect that the form in which this parable has come down to us has been modified by the actual experience of persecution by the Church.) There have been other methods of treatment which have brought **obloquy and anguish** on members of the Church, and they have always helped and cheered the victims by their support and sympathy. Not only so, but they have themselves been subject to the same forms of persecution, and, like worthy athletes in the arena, they have **endured** the **hard struggle.** No stress from the outside has strained them into compliance with the wishes of their persecutors, and they have remained faithful under all trials.

An interesting feature of the persecution is suggested in the latter part of verse 34, where mention is made of **confiscation of . . . belongings.** This may have been due to the action of magistrates who imposed heavy fines, but the Greek word has not that judicial *nuance* which its English equivalent carries, and the reference may be to rioting and mob-plunder. We have no other record of a persecution which was marked by these features but not by actual martyrdoms; possibly the case was too common to be considered worthy of special notice by Church historians. Their attention was naturally more attracted by the severer forms of attack. But we have information of numerous occasions on which Jews, especially in Alexandria, suffered such treatment as is here described, and it may well be that Christians, in the early days, shared in the reproach of Judaism. If the letter was addressed to Ephesian Christians, we may compare the experiences of St. Paul in that city, and suppose that explosions of violence

[1] Matt. xxv. 36, 39, 43, 44.

against Christians had become almost traditional with the mob. But, wherever they were, and whatever they had endured, it is clear that they had acquitted themselves worthily of their faith.

The mention of **confiscation** introduces another element in the thought of the early Church. It recognized the difference between earthly and heavenly possessions, and, in the spirit of St. Paul and of Luther's great hymn, declared that there was no comparison between them. Cheerful acquiescence in material loss was always held to be one of the signs of the higher philosophic mind in the ancient world, and the fact that the Christians were able to attain to it should have given them a high place in the regard of thoughtful men. No doubt their eschatology was a help to them ; if the material world was soon to end, property had little significance. But it should always be a mark of the spirit of the Christian that he should own nothing, outside himself, to which he cannot say good-bye with a smile. This, at least, is a legitimate deduction from the teaching of Jesus,[1] and in this consciousness that **elsewhere** they **had higher . . . lasting, possessions,** the Church addressed by this writer did not fall short of Christ's standard.

The influence of eschatological belief in strengthening this point of view is well brought out in the succeeding verses. The virtue of endurance, of **steady patience,** had been exhibited in time of persecution, and it needed still to be maintained for the little while that would elapse before the consummation of the age. If they could cling to this, they would **get what** they had **been promised.** The time would not be long, for every day brought nearer the coming of the Lord, and in support of this view the writer quotes a sentence from Isa. xxvi. 20—one of the great eschatological passages of the Old Testament. To this he adds a verse from Habakkuk (ii. 4) which evidently greatly attracted the early Christian thinkers, since it is cited also by St. Paul in support of his doctrine of justification by faith.[2] Our author, however, uses the words in a different way, and, it must be admitted, is nearer to the thought of the prophet himself than is St. Paul. It is by this

[1] Cp. Matt. vi. 19–29. [2] Cp. Rom. i. 17, Gal. iii. 11.

endurance, by fidelity to calling, principle, and experience, that the **just man continues to live.** At the same time this verse contains a warning. (It may be remarked in passing that the meaning of the prophet's words is very uncertain. A number of interpretations have been suggested, and few would be bold enough to say that our author's is necessarily the right—or the wrong—one.) If a man **shrinks back,** he is in danger of losing all that he has yet won. This is quite in line with what the writer has said about apostasy, though it is less severely expressed, and may have a wider and a milder reference. And, once again, the writer gives utterance to his confidence that his friends will not fall into error, that their patience will endure and that they will **have faith and so . . . win** their **souls.**

Faith, as suggested by the quotation from Habakkuk, means fidelity. But that is very far from exhausting the connotation of the word, even to this writer, who reads, perhaps, less into it than St. Paul does. And, now that the main portion of his work is finished, he feels free to dilate on this point and to give a fuller account of what he intends his readers to understand by it. The great chapter which follows, is, however, a separate entity, and can best be treated as such.

VI. xi. 1–xii. 29 : Conclusion : Practical Exhortations

The formal task which the writer of Hebrews set before himself came to an end with x. 18. Up to that point, in spite of sundry homiletic digressions, the main thread of the great argument was followed, and the unique position and work of Jesus was set forth. Fortunately the book does not end with the completion of the theological demonstration, and we may fairly look for the most valuable part after its conclusion. A man who has something really to offer the world can never be at his best in mere dialectic, and, though logic cannot altogether hide his real message (again and again in reading this book we have seen it breaking through to the surface), it does tend to give it a second place and sometimes to obscure it.

Now the writer is more than ever free to express his real thought, and to expound for us the eternal truth which has so strongly gripped him. So we find that some of the most familiar and most treasured passages in the Epistle are to be found in the last three chapters.

xi.

Now faith means we are confident of what we hope for, con- 1
vinced of what we do not see. It was for this that the men 2
of old won their record.

While the subjects treated in the last three chapters of this Epistle cover a wide range, the author finds means of linking them up with one another. It would, perhaps, be more correct to say that he is led on from each theme to the next by some word or thought on which his attention especially fastens. So here the conception of **faith** is brought to his mind by the last clause of ch. x., and he has an opportunity of speaking of it at some length. In so doing he gives his readers, not only a definition, but a long list of the historic exponents of **faith,** and this famous chapter forms a panegyric on the Fathers of Israel. Such passages are found elsewhere in Jewish writing, and the best known is that which appears in Ecclus. xliv. ff. It is quite possible that our author had this or some similar list in his mind.

At the end of the list, in xi. 40, the writer links up this long line of heroes with his own contemporaries, saying **God . . . would not have them perfected apart from us.** That is to say, the generation which actually received the promise, and saw the Christ, was one with all those who had gone before. They had not seen with their own eyes, nor experienced in their own persons, the actuality of divine salvation. Yet it could not have been denied to them ; it was theirs, though theirs in a different fashion from that in which the Christian Church might claim it. It was **faith** which had made it theirs, and, in them, had taken the place of that experience which was necessarily denied them.

Faith, as we shall see if we read this passage carefully, **means** much more than that **we are confident of what we hope for,**

convinced of what we do not see. At the very least, it is the faculty which enables us to achieve this result. We hope for certain things, and, as long as we merely hope, we cannot claim them as our own, or assert that they have been brought into the realm of real experience. **Faith** is something which makes them real, which gives to them an existence as valid as that of the objects of ordinary experience. It ' substantiates ' —gives ' substance ' to things for which, otherwise, we can only hope, and though our certitude and the reality of the things in question may be of a different kind from that which we acquire through seeing and handling, they are equally reliable, and may equally safely be made the basis of our living and of our thinking.

More than once we have had to notice that this writer is imbued with the Platonic (or Philonian-Platonic) doctrine of the two worlds, the unseen, supra-sensual world of God, and that which may be known and appreciated by the exercise of our physical powers. To most of us the latter has a validity which the former has not ; that is because we have not **faith.** If we possessed this quality, the eternal world would become as real to us as the ephemeral, the spiritual as valid as the material. Our doubt and our dim vision would cease to trouble us ; we should be *certain* of the things of God. In forming our impressions and opinions of the ordinary world, all the evidence we want to convince us is that of our senses, and we sometimes foolishly say ' seeing is believing.' But seeing is *not* believing, for it belongs to a totally different realm. It may, and should, take the place of seeing, and it should give to us exactly the same degree of certainty—or, perhaps, a higher degree of certainty—as the physical experience of sight. Just as the evidence of our eyes proves certain facts to us (those facts that are on the lower, material plane), so the evidence of **faith** proves to us certain other facts which belong to the higher, spiritual plane. It is that by which we are **convinced of what we do not see.**

The principle may be illustrated by reference to **the men of old.** These are the heroes of Israelite history, and it is quite in harmony with the whole of the writer's theory that he should

assume that they have had always before them a great ideal which they could not fully attain, but which, nevertheless, was profoundly real to them. Some of them may seem to us to have been strangely chosen, and in one or two instances we suspect a curious logic, but, in the main, the list is one of noble figures, and the author's contention seems to be justified. The chapter forms one of the most eloquent and stately passages in all literature.

It is by faith we understand that the world was fashioned by the word of God, and thus the visible was made out of the invisible. 3

While the form of this verse shows that it is intended to be the first of the illustrations of **faith**, it clearly occupies a different position from that of the cases cited later. It does not deal with the **faith** of a hero of the past, but with that of the writer and of his contemporaries—**It is by faith that *we* understand. . . .** He wished to begin at the very beginning, and, since there were no men whatever to exercise **faith**, he has to vary the thought in order to preserve the external symmetry.

The subject of this act of faith is worth a moment's consideration. A belief in the existence of the world is not an act of faith, it is an impression given by experience. The view that **the world was fashioned** is a natural, if not inevitable, deduction from facts observed by the organs of sense, for it is only an advanced physical philosophy which thinks of the material universe as being eternal. But that this result was achieved **by the word of God** is a theory for which there is no sensible evidence. It is attested by Scripture, but the acceptance of Scripture as authoritative in such matters is in itself possible only through the exercise of **faith**, the only means whereby man can be assured of the divine origin of the universe, and of the fact that it came into being in response to God's *fiat* as described in Gen. i.

The reason why God so created the world is linked up with the writer's metaphysical basis. He does not suggest that it

was made out of nothing; on the contrary, he would have repudiated such a statement most energetically. What he does believe is that this **visible** edifice was constructed out of the **invisible.** On his premisses it is that latter which has the greater claim to reality, for that which can be appreciated by the sense is but a copy of the eternal thing which belongs to the realm of pure spirit. He varies his words in a way which is not suggested by the English translation, for, while he uses the common term for **visible,** that which he employs for **invisible** belongs more properly to the vocabulary of philosophy. His stress, too, is negative rather than positive—' it was not out of the secondary, " phenomenal," that what we see was constructed (but from the primary, the spiritual).' This, in the nature of the case, is a truth of which men can be convinced **only by faith.**

4 It was by faith that Abel offered God a richer sacrifice than Cain did, and thus won from God the record of being ' just,' on the score of what he gave ; he died, but by his faith he is speaking to us still.

The writer evidently failed to find anything in the record of Adam and Eve which would justify him in including either or both in his list, but in the second generation he has Abel ready for his purpose. The question of the original meaning of the story of Gen. iv. belongs rather to the study of that book than to a discussion of *Hebrews*, but we may safely say that, whatever the main thought in the primitive writer's mind may have been, it did not occur to him that it was **by faith that Abel offered God a richer sacrifice than Cain did.** If he had been pressed to give his reasons, the author would probably have replied in language such as that which he uses of Enoch, and have said that Abel **satisfied God, and apart from faith it is impossible to satisfy Him.** At least we can say that the evidence for Abel's **faith** is no weaker than that which may be adduced for Enoch's.

Two results followed from this **faith** of Abel's. The first is that he **won from God the record of being ' just,' on the score**

of what he gave. Had the gift been presented without **faith** (presumably this is what Cain did), God could not have attested Abel's righteousness; we have, apparently, lying behind this statement a reminiscence of the great sentence quoted from Habakkuk in x. 38. In the second place the writer seems to feel that there is some special significance in the statement that the blood of Abel 'cried from the ground.'[1] This suggests that his influence may be felt after his death, and our author adds—what, indeed, he might have said of every man whose faith has left its mark in human history—**that by his faith he is speaking to us still.** Here, at least, no modern reader will wish to cavil at the principle involved. It is profoundly true that every good life bears its witness for the generations which follow, and, even though the man's name and deeds may be forgotten, yet they inevitably add something invaluable and ineradicable to the life of the race.

It was by faith that Enoch was taken to heaven, so that he 5
never died (*he was not overtaken by death, for God had taken him away*). **For before he was taken to heaven, his record was that** *he had satisfied* God;* **and apart from** 6
faith it is impossible *to satisfy Him*, **for the man who draws near to God must believe that He exists and that He does reward those who seek Him.**

* Here, as elsewhere, 'satisfy' is used in the sense of a servant giving satisfaction to his master.

Enoch is one of the Old Testament figures who most attracted the imagination of Judaism in the second and first centuries B.C. His name, as far as we know, was more used in the apocalyptic literature than any other, the view that he **was taken to heaven, so that he never died** was widely held. Others, however, noting the fact that the biblical figures allow to him a much shorter life than to any other antediluvian patriarch, suppose the expression 'God took him' to imply that he died comparatively young.

The reference is an interesting illustration of the fact that

[1] Gen. iv. 10.

the writer of Hebrews relied for his Old Testament knowledge solely on the text of the LXX, for where the Hebrew has 'walked with God,' the Greek interprets '*satisfied God.*' The language is the more significant, inasmuch as the Hebrew phrase would certainly have suited our author better than the Greek, since, to a mind which did not suspect these old stories of anthropomorphism, this record of continuous communion with God would necessarily have implied that power of 'seeing the invisible' which is the essence of **faith** as expounded in this Epistle. As it is, however, the reasoning is not without force. It is obviously impossible for a man so to live as to **satisfy** (as a servant satisfies his master) a God in whose existence he does not believe. But, further, the natural incentive to this adequate service is the conviction that the master **does reward** those who deserve it. It is not enough merely to hold that God **exists**; true faith means a penetration beyond the veil of sense and matter, which will give a clue to the divine character, and it is this feature of Enoch's spiritual life on which the stress is laid.

7 It was by faith that Noah, after being told by God what was still unseen, reverently constructed an ark to save his household; thus he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that follows faith.

The applicability of the story of Noah to the writer's purpose is more obvious than that of his earlier illustrations. For, when the command to build the ark came to him, there was as yet no indication of the necessity for it, and he had to take the word of God on trust. Not only so, but the contrast with the actions and attitude of his contemporaries **condemned the world.** Others might have done as he did, for their opportunities were the same as his. Later tradition, indeed (represented even in the Koran), depicted him as preaching to his fellows and urging them **save** themselves as he did, but even the biblical record justifies the statement that he **became heir of the righteousness that follows faith.**

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed his call to *go forth* to a 8
place which he would receive as an inheritance ; he went
forth, although he did not know where he was to go. It 9
was by faith that he *sojourned* in the promised land, as in
a foreign country, residing in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob
who were co-heirs with him of the same promise ; he 10
was waiting for the City with its fixed foundations, whose
builder and maker is God. It was by faith that even Sara 11
got strength to conceive, bearing a son when she was past
the age for it—because she considered she could rely on
Him who gave the promise. Thus a single man, though he 12
was physically impotent, had issue in number *like the stars*
in heaven, countless as the sand on the seashore.

As we should expect, it is Abraham who receives more attention in this list than any other, since he stands out among the patriarchs as a real hero of **faith**. With him is included Sarah, and three illustrations of their **faith** are given in this passage ; another follows later.[1] The first is one which must have appealed to every reader of the Old Testament story, the fact that **Abraham obeyed his call to *go forth* to a place which he would receive as an inheritance.** No stress is laid on the parting from friends and kindred, but in Abraham's action we certainly may claim that we have the **faith** which can make a great venture. **He did not** even **know where he was to go,** and yet he dared to launch out into the unknown, because God had called him. Here we have a confidence, a certainty of God, which cannot fail to impress us. In a sense **all** religious life is based upon **faith** of this kind. Men are called to abandon the obvious things which they have acquired and with which they are familiar, and to place their whole reliance on something which they themselves have never seen. None of us knows what God has in store for us, whether in this life or in the next, and even for the conditions of the latter we are forced to rely on metaphors derived from our earthly experience. But we know the God who has called

[1] Verses 17–19.

us—if we have the **faith** of which the writer speaks—and that is enough for us.

Even when Abraham reached the **promised land**, and was able to recognize the gift that God had to bestow on him,[1] he had not yet entered into possession of it. As a matter of fact he never realized the practical fulfilment of the promise. Palestine was a land of cities, even in Abraham's day, and the life to which his descendants were destined was that of the settled farmer and of the dweller in towns. Yet, so the narrative of Genesis runs, on the day of his death the only spot of land Abraham could call his own was the tomb in which lay the bones of his wife, and he wandered about Canaan **as in a foreign country, residing in tents.** The civic order which he could claim as pledged to him by God was, after all, but an earthly symbol (once more we have the writer's philosophic doctrine rising to the surface) of the spiritual, eternal **City with its fixed foundations, whose builder and maker is God.** That was an immeasurably greater inheritance than any that he could know on earth, and the best that Palestine—or any other land—could have offered was but an image of the heavenly possession. Abraham's acceptance of the **promised land** demanded no less **faith** than his original venture from his home in Harran.

The third illustration introduces Sarah, and is a little puzzling, because in verse 12 the writer reverts abruptly to Abraham again. It has even been suspected that Sarah is a later introduction into the text, and that Abraham himself was originally the subject of the verbs in verse 11. But the suggestion is made in Gen. xviii. 11 that both husband and wife were too old to have any expectation of children, and, though Sarah's attitude as described in Gen. xviii. suggests incredulity rather than **faith**, the writer probably felt that she must have changed her point of view, or she could have had no son. In a sense we may say that the **faith** displayed here is even greater than in the preceding instances, since it demanded an actual miracle, a contravention of the laws of human physical nature as they were known and understood.

[1] Cp., e.g., Gen. xiii. 14.

The writer's point is that it was the faith of Sarah and of Abraham, and that alone, which so far renewed their bodily powers as to make parenthood possible to them.

(**These all died in faith without obtaining the promises ; they** 13
only saw them far away and hailed them, owning they
were ' *strangers and exiles* **upon earth.' Now people who** 14
speak in this way plainly show they are in search of a
fatherland. If they thought of the land they have left 15
behind, they would have time to go back, but they really 16
aspire to the better land in heaven. That is why God is
not ashamed to be called their God ; He has prepared a
City for them.)

These verses are a digression from the main theme. Such temporary departures from the thread of his discourse appear elsewhere in the Epistle, but this has features which differentiate it from the others. Elsewhere the thought has usually been interrupted purely for homiletic purposes, in order to point a moral or to give a warning. Here the intrusive paragraph really forms a part of the argument, and in a slightly different context it would have a natural place in the flow of the thought. We note also that it comes in the middle of the illustrations of Abraham's faith, and separates two paragraphs which would naturally come together. Elsewhere the digressions either stand at the end of a definite portion of the reasoning, or we find the original subject deliberately reintroduced with an obvious consciousness of the need for a return to it. Here the sense seems to require that verse 17 should follow directly on verse 12. Yet more striking is the obvious fact that it introduces persons who, though alluded to in verse 9, do not receive their due treatment till verses 20 ff. In the circumstances it is a little surprising that students of the book have not suggested that we have here an accidental dislocation of the text, and that these four verses originally stood after verse 21, or, better, after verse 22.

Whether the position of this paragraph be the correct one or not, it is clear that the phrase '**these all**' includes at least

Isaac and Jacob as well as Abraham. Though Isaac is said to have sown corn,[1] and Jacob to have built a house and more or less permanent structures for the accommodation of his flocks[2] to the east of Jordan, the tradition elsewhere knows the patriarchs only as nomads, and our author shows no sign of taking these lapses from the purely pastoral life into account. These wanderers admitted that they were '*strangers and exiles* upon earth'—a phrase which is reminiscent of language ascribed in Gen. xxiii. 4 to Abraham, and in Gen. xlvii. 9 to Jacob. The very use of such terms proves that these men knew that they had a home, but it was not in the land where they were dwelling for the time. Nor was it, in very truth, in any country on earth, for they were citizens of Heaven. That is an inevitable corollary of their faith, for the unseen and eternal is what counts with them, while they can never take the visible and temporal as their final resting-place. Yet they have a clear vision of that which they seek, recognizing it as their true home, and not only do they see their goal from far away, but they even hail it with exultation in the distance. That is the fatherland of which they are in search, the better land in heaven, the City which God has prepared for them.

To the author of Hebrews, then, the patriarchs of old had before them the conception of a heavenly Jerusalem. Their faith was doubly manifested, for they not only saw the full realization of their hopes, with that faith which enables men to pierce the clouds of time and sense, but they were ready to sacrifice everything else to their single goal. It seems as though the migration from Harran were, to the mind of the writer, symbolical, and to be mystically interpreted as the setting out of the spirit on the quest of the eternal City. The pilgrims may, at any point on the journey, retrace their steps and return to the land they have left behind. The world is still with them, and they can, at any moment, abandon the spiritual home to which they aspire, and take such satisfaction as they can find in the things about them. But it is characteristic of the patriarchs—and it is thus that they have fully

[1] Gen. xxvi. 12. [2] Gen. xxxiii. 17.

earned their right to be called men of **faith**—that they have never wavered or faltered, but have kept unswerving on their course, convinced, beyond all possibility of doubt, of the reality of their prospects.

Though the fulfilment of the promise has been delayed, it is nevertheless certain. They have attained to life eternal, a home beyond the grave. To establish this truth, the writer uses language not unlike that of Jesus Himself, and it is not impossible that some form of a Gospel or of a collection of the sayings of our Lord was in his hands. Just as Jesus, reasoning with the Sadducees on the question of immortality, appealed to the record which stated that Yahweh had described Himself as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,[1] so this writer, apparently with the same passage in mind, recalls that **God is not ashamed to be called their God.** This implies what Jesus[2] also deduced from the passage, that, since God is the God of the living and not of the dead, the patriarchs are still living, and have, therefore, entered into the life which was really promised to them. This argument is not the mere logical quibble that it seems on the surface to be. It contains a deep truth, for it is based on the conviction that if men are actually in touch with God, if they *know* Him and can experience His friendship, if, as our author might say, they have **faith,** then it is impossible for a physical event like death to break the link which binds them to the God whom they trust and love. They who are His are His for ever.

It was by faith, *when Abraham was put to the test, that he* 17
sacrificed Isaac ; **he was ready to sacrifice** *his only son,*
although he had received the promises and had been told 18
that *it is through Isaac that your offspring shall be reckoned*
—for he considered that God was able even to raise men 19
from the dead. Hence he did get him back, by what was a parable of the resurrection.

The text turns back to Abraham again, and cites the incident which has always been reckoned as the supreme *test* of his

[1] Cp. Exod. iii. 6, 15, 16. [2] Cp. Mark xii. 26 f.

faith. It is not strictly accurate to say that ***Abraham*** . . . ***sacrificed Isaac***, and the sentence printed as a quotation does not actually occur in Gen. xxii. It is, nevertheless, a fair summary of the narrative in that chapter, though we shall miss the writer's meaning unless we take his choice of tenses into account. The word rendered ***sacrificed*** is in the perfect, that translated **he was ready to sacrifice** in the imperfect. The former tense is used to imply that, so far as God's demands were concerned, Abraham's action was already completed ; he did ideally offer up **his only son**, and fell in no way short of the divine requirement. It is almost as if we had the two worlds again in view, and while, seen from the standpoint of the eternal, the gift of Abraham was consummated, yet in the contrasted physical and material realm it was an intention, a task begun but not finished. This is a fair interpretation of the story, since it seems to have a double purpose. In the first place it is designed to illustrate Abraham's **faith** and devotion, and in the second place it surely serves as a protest against human sacrifice, for, after all, Isaac was not slain on the altar.

The type of **faith** exhibited is, then, not so much that appreciation of the unseen world which is implied in the definition standing at the head of this chapter, as a personal confidence in the God who had made the **promises** to Abraham, and, seemingly, had enjoined an action which would render those **promises** nugatory. The stories told of Abraham have running through them a thread of peculiar interest from the point of view taken by this writer. God has guaranteed to Abraham certain gifts which are to be realized after his death. Yet the fulfilment of these **promises** is constantly imperilled. First the woman through whom the patriarch's descendants are to enter the world is taken into the harem of a foreign prince, and so appears to be lost to the race. Then time passes until both parents are too old to expect children, and Abraham is led into the belief that it is only the child of a concubine who will continue his line. Even when the son of promise is actually born, his is the one life which stands between Abraham and the failure of his hopes, and that life

is threatened by the command of God Himself. Here we have a truth which is of profound value for the human spirit, a point at which hope and faith merge into one another. 'There is something in man which is always apparently on the eve of disappearing, but never disappears, an assurance which is always apparently saying farewell and yet illimitably lingers, a string which is always stretched to snapping and yet never snaps. . . . The queerest and most delicate thing in us, the most fragile, the most fantastic, is in truth the backbone and indestructible. . . . There never was an age of assurance . . . there never was an age of faith. Faith is always at a disadvantage; it is a perpetually defeated thing which survives all its conquerors.'[1] While the author of *Hebrews* would not have endorsed this phraseology *in toto*, he would have recognized the great moral fact that the supreme good of mankind stands always on the brink of destruction and is never destroyed. Faith such as that of Abraham is the refusal to believe in the possibility that it ever can be destroyed. Though, to all human appearance, the final hope should perish and the only son who is the last chance of the fulfilment of the divine promises should be slain, yet God will raise men from the dead rather than let one jot or tittle of His word fail.

It was by faith that Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in connexion with the future. It was by faith that, when Jacob was dying, he blessed each of the sons of Joseph, *bending in prayer over the head of his staff.* **It was by faith that Joseph at his end thought about the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders about his own bones.** 20 21 22

The last three patriarchs mentioned are summarily treated, and, in each case a single incident is selected in order to suggest that they, like Abraham, could see beyond their own lifetime and their own conditions into a future in which the divine promises should be fully realized. Isaac has far less space devoted to him in Genesis than has either his father or his son. The most significant action recorded of him belongs less

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *Watts*, pp. 98, 101.

to his life than to that of his sons, and consists of the final 'blessing' which he pronounced upon them. As a matter of fact, it was Jacob alone whom **he blessed** according to the narrative in Gen. xxvii.; the utterance over Esau is in reality a curse. But, whichever it may be, it indicates a reliance on the future fulfilment of the **promises** of God. To the speaker these are already in operation; his **faith** enables him to see them with such clearness that they are, to all intents and purposes, present facts.

The blessing of the **sons of Joseph** by **Jacob,** and Joseph's prevision of **the exodus** and instructions **about his own bones,** belong to the same category as the instance already quoted of Isaac's **faith.** Important light is thrown on the character and fortunes of the text of the Old Testament by the quotation from Gen. xlvii. 31 which appears at the end of verse 21. Till a comparatively late period, Hebrew was written with consonants only, and it was not till some centuries after the date of this Epistle that our familiar system of indicating Hebrew vowels was perfected. Naturally the LXX, which is about three hundred years earlier than our present book, had no indication of the vocalization of the text, though it is surprising to find how nearly its pronunciation agreed with that which the Palestinian tradition has handed down to us in our Hebrew Bible. But here we have an interesting variant in pronunciation, for whereas the LXX (rendering the text current in the third century B.C. among Egyptian Jews) has at the end of Gen. xlvii. 31 the word translated '**staff,**' the English versions, following the Palestinian text, have 'bed.' The difference is simply one of vocalization, for the Hebrew consonants are the same in both cases—MTH. But the Palestinian Jews pronounced the word *miṭṭah* (= bed), and the Egyptian Jews *maṭṭeh* (= staff).

23 **It was by faith that Moses** *was hidden for three months* **after**
birth by his parents, because *they saw* **the child was**
24 *beautiful,* **and had no fear of the royal decree. It was by**
faith that *Moses* **refused,** *when he had grown up,* **to be called**
25 **the son of Pharaoh's daughter; ill-treatment with God's**

people he preferred to the passing pleasures of sin, con- 26
sidering obloquy with the messiah to be richer wealth than
all Egypt's treasures—for he had an eye to the Reward.
It was by faith that he left Egypt, not from any fear of 27
the king's wrath ; like one who saw the King Invisible,
he never flinched. It was by faith that he celebrated *the* 28
***passover* and performed the sprinkling by blood, so that**
***the destroying angel* might not touch Israel's first-born.**
It was by faith that they crossed the Red Sea like dry land 29
—and when the Egyptians attempted it they were drowned.

Illustrations are now drawn from the life of Moses, and it is interesting to observe how the writer seems to be relying on rabbinic tradition rather than on the text of the Old Testament itself. There are cases where he not merely adds to the facts as stated in Exodus, but actually contradicts them, preferring to give an interpretation of events which is more suitable to his purpose than the Old Testament narrative itself would be.

The first instance of **faith** in the life of Moses is not strictly his own, but that of his parents. This is one of the cases where the writer seems to have imported into the story the virtue which he desires to find there. The real motive seems to have been affection for the child and a recognition of the fact that he was ***beautiful***—both admirable in themselves, but neither necessarily offering an exhibition of **faith.** The latter, however, may, perhaps, be seen in the last clause of verse 23, where the writer (with no direct warrant from the original story) adds that the father and mother of Moses **had no fear of the royal decree.** Here we have a clear reference to that confidence which is one of the aspects of **faith,** though there is nothing to suggest that Moses was to his parents a child of **promise,** or that they had any inkling of the high destiny in store for him.

The next three verses tell us of the **faith** of Moses himself. We may remind ourselves that the only thing we are told about him in Exod. ii. before his flight from Egypt is contained in the story of his interference on behalf of his oppressed brethren

and its sequel. It is from his championship of a Hebrew against an Egyptian, apparently, that there arose the tradition which is reflected here. It is not confined to this writer, and appears in several forms, of which the most striking is a tale of how, when yet a baby, he was offered the royal crown and cast it from him. Unless we can assume a deduction from the phrase in Exod. ii. 9, 'he went forth unto his brethren,' it would seem that the writer and his readers were familiar with another story, which has not survived, to the effect that, ***when he had grown up***, he deliberately identified himself with his own people, and formally repudiated his Egyptian nationality and status, refusing **to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.**

A fuller type of **faith** is suggested by the writer's comment on Moses' attitude and actions. He sees in the contrast between Egypt and Israel a picture, on the material plane, of the contrast between the ideal and the phenomenal, between good and evil, between **sin** and righteousness. On the one hand there are comfort, high rank, **pleasure**, and the prospect of inheriting the fabulous **wealth** of the Egyptian royal house —but all belong to the visible world, and are ephemeral. On the other side stand **ill-treatment**, poverty, and **obloquy**, but he who has **preferred** these things has ranged himself with **God's people**, and has taken his position on the side of that **messiah** whose coming is held to be inherent in all the **promises** made to the ancestors of Israel. This choice, however, involves that insight into the reality of the present and the certainty of the future, which the writer regards as an essential element in **faith**, for it implies that Moses could see, not only the true meaning of the events in which he played a part, but also the **Reward**. The writer uses here a strong and significant verb, with which we shall meet again in xii. 2, and implies that Moses was not merely aware of the future recompense, but that he concentrated his gaze upon it to the exclusion of all else. It was his only consideration, and dominated and controlled all his actions. We must agree that history has justified his choice. We do not know who the king of Egypt was, but his age and his house are to-day dead subjects, of interest only to the archaeologist, save in so far as they illustrate the

life of Moses and of his people. The national and religious movements which Moses initiated are still living, and have exercised on the world an influence whose importance it is impossible to overrate.

When, however, the writer tells us that it was by faith that Moses left Egypt, not from any fear of the king's wrath, he directly ignores and contradicts the statement made in Exod. ii. 14 that Moses was afraid. The language used, however, would fit the account given of the events which took place after the return of Moses to Egypt. Possibly our author has telescoped the two sets of incidents into a single one, and is really thinking, in verse 27, of the way in which Moses stood before Pharaoh and made his demand in the name of Yahweh. In the face of that angry monarch he never flinched, but held his ground without wavering or yielding. If we can accept some such explanation as this, then the situation becomes intelligible. Moses stands before the Egyptian king, but he is, all the time, conscious of another—probably, as the translation above suggests, another king. His faith enables him to detect that which lies outside the realm of normal physical experience, and to see the Invisible.[1] Since he knows that he has God behind him and in front of him, impelling and protecting him, fear is impossible to him, and there is no reason why he should shrink. Here we have, perhaps even more clearly than in any other passage, an indication of what faith meant to this writer.

The celebration of the *passover* is adduced as another example of the faith of Moses. In this all Israel shared, but the rest were acting under the instructions of their leader, and the primary responsibility fell upon him. The faith involved is of the same type as that which is ascribed to Noah, reliance on a divine communication which foretold coming disaster, and the adoption of measures which would protect men from it. The writer does not dwell on the details, beyond calling attention to the prophylactic sprinkling of the blood; it is enough to have noted the general action as an illustration of Moses' faith.

[1] We may remember also that Moses is said to have seen God, cp. Exod. xxiv. 10, and Philo's treatment of Exod. xx. 21 in *De Mut. Nom.* § 2.

In the crossing of the **Red Sea** the **faith** of Moses is transmitted to the whole community of which he was the leader. The writer clearly thought of the miracle as being made possible only by **faith.** Israel had, through Moses, the divine command, and implicitly accepted it and relied upon it. Therefore the **sea** became to them **like dry land,** and they passed safely over. But the motive of the Egyptians was not **faith** ; it was partly the desire for vengeance, and partly the wish to bring Israel back again into slavery. Such a state of mind can command no miracle, with the result that when the **Egyptians attempted** to follow Israel, the sea returned to its usual bed, and **they were drowned.** This is the one instance in the chapter which calls special attention to the meaning of **faith** by noting the result of its absence.

30 **It was by faith that the walls of Jericho collapsed, after being**
31 **surrounded for only seven days. It was by faith that Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, as she had welcomed the scouts peaceably.**

It is clear that the writer cannot continue indefinitely with a complete list of all the incidents in the Old Testament in which **faith** is to be noted. He makes no mention of any events in the wilderness, though the defeat of Amalek at Rephidim[1] might have afforded him a useful example. He passes over such narratives as those of Moses smiting the rock, and even the crossing of the Jordan. But, before he brings to an end his list of detailed events, he refers to the capture of Jericho. Recent excavation suggests that the collapse of the city walls was due to an earthquake, but the writer naturally accepted the story in Joshua at its face value. Here, as in the case of Abraham and Sarah, the **faith** consists in the confidence that God is prepared to interfere miraculously in favour of those who obey His orders and trust His word. The **faith** of **Rahab the harlot** is more difficult to explain, and we may suspect that the position she held in later Jewish thought (she appears in the genealogy of David, and so of Jesus) may have

[1] Exod. xvii. 8–16.

made the writer feel that she must not be omitted. Possibly, too, her faith lay in the conviction that Israel must ultimately be victorious, even though it would have seemed that the enterprise of reducing so strong a city as Jericho was hopeless to a people unskilled in the art of siege warfare.

And what more shall I say? Time would fail me to tell of 32
Gideon, of Barak, and Samson and Jephthah, of David and
Samuel and the prophets—men who by faith conquered 33
kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut
the mouth of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped 34
the edge of the sword, from weakness won to strength,
proved valiant in warfare, and routed hosts of foreigners.
Some were given back to their womankind, raised from 35
the very dead; others were broken on the wheel, refusing
to accept release, that they might obtain a better resurrec-
tion; others, again, had to experience scoffs and scourg- 36
ing, aye chains and imprisonment—they were stoned,* 37
sawn in two, and cut to pieces; they had to roam about
in sheepskins and goatskins, forlorn, oppressed, ill-treated
(men of whom the world was not worthy), wanderers in 38
the desert and among the hills, in caves and gullies.

* The next word, *ἐπειράσθησαν*, is either due to dittography (with the following *ἐπρίσθησαν*) or a corruption of some word like *ἐπυράσθησαν* or *ἐπειρώθησαν*. I have left it untranslated.

Detailed illustrations of the men of faith would take too long for the writer, and he passes to a general statement. Like most Jews and Christians brought up in the Alexandrian tradition, his main interest in the Old Testament is reserved for the Law, but he is very far from suggesting that divine inspiration and human faith ceased with the close of the patriarchal age, or even with the conquest of Palestine. There are judges, kings, prophets, and martyrs beyond number, whose achievements and sufferings he can only generalize. At the same time, it would seem that the author had some definite individual or group in his mind as he mentioned each class.

At the outset half a dozen persons are mentioned as being typical of the men of faith through the ages. When we think

over their record, the names of some of them fall strangely on a modern ear, though Jewish tradition took a higher view of their character and exploits. Gideon, it is true, has much to be said for him, especially since, after he had fully tested the reality of the divine mission entrusted to him, he carried out his task without flinching, and both stood as the champion of the pure religion of Israel against Canaanite syncretism, and fearlessly won deliverance for his people, in spite of the scanty supply of men allowed to him. Yet we cannot forget that one of the motives ascribed to him was the savage impulse to blood-revenge (a sacred duty in his day) and that he was the author of a form of idolatry which a later age condemned. Barak does not appear as a hero of faith in Judges iv. and v. He would not act apart from the prophetess Deborah, and his victory was crowned with an act of dastardly treachery (for which, however, he was not personally responsible) which violated even the low standards of his age. Samson can hardly be credited even with patriotism ; his exploits were those of the individualist, and his value to his own nation as a champion against the Philistines was negligible. Jephthah's triumph was stained with human sacrifice. David and Samuel, however, may, on the strength of the biblical record, be placed in the same category as Abraham and Moses, and, in spite of undeniable weaknesses (especially noticeable in the case of David), they deserve a place in any list of men after God's own heart. Samuel is placed after David, presumably, because the writer thinks of him as standing at the head of the goodly fellowship of the prophets.

But, while we find fault with the men whose names are thus brought before us, we should not regret their inclusion in the list. With all their sins and failings, they did occupy a place in the slow and long growth of divine revelation, and they can hardly be said, in the main, to have fallen far below the standards of their own age. It is surely true that every man who plays his part in his own society and time should be accounted fit for remembrance. Faith is demanded of all of us, even in the accomplishment of the duties of any position, for our normal tasks can and will be adequately fulfilled only

if they are related, however dimly, to a larger vision of the world as it is and as it may be. Such a list as this may well be an inspiration to the comparatively weak and insignificant. Only a few can write their names on the page of history, but they are typical of numberless unknown men and women who have done their share, through their faith, in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.

Abandoning even the specimen names, the writer continues with deeds typical of those which may be wrought by men and women of faith. In each case, as we have already remarked, he seems to have had before his mind some specific instance, and it is fairly clear that he draws, not only on the Old Testament record proper, but also on tradition and on the later history of pre-Christian Israel. Thus the reference to those who **conquered kingdoms** may have in view Joshua, or David, or any of the successful warrior kings of Israel and Judah. Those who **administered justice** are probably, in the writer's mind, the pre-monarchic judges, though there may also be a reminiscence of the famous judgement of Solomon.[1] The task is one which requires special qualifications in the East; honesty and impartiality are far from being the only virtues needed. An oriental judge must have insight into character, mental agility, and fertility in the devising of novel expedients for testing witnesses. It is a familiar principle that the only evidence on which the least reliance can be placed is circumstantial, and that is not infrequently manufactured. It is difficult to think at once of a specific instance in which a **promise was obtained,** but it is clear that here the application may be quite general. It is, however, obvious that the person who **shut the mouth of lions** was Daniel,[2] while it was his three companions who **quenched the power of fire.**[3] Numbers of men, especially among the prophets, **escaped the edge of the sword**—perhaps the writer has Jeremiah[4] particularly in mind. Samson, though named earlier, may be one of those who **from weakness won to strength,**[5] though there may possibly be a recollection of recovery from sickness such as that of Hezekiah.

[1] 1 Kings iii. 16–28. [2] Dan. vi. [3] Dan. iii.
[4] Cp. Jer. xxvi. [5] Judges xvi. 28–30.

The instances of men who **proved valiant in warfare, and routed hosts of foreigners** are so numerous that we can hardly conjecture any specific case as being probably present to the writer's mind. Both Elijah[1] and Elisha[2] are said to have **raised dead** children and to have **given** them **back to their** mothers.

Up to this point the writer has been giving illustrations of the triumphs won through **faith.** He now turns to what it enables men to endure, and we have a list of martyrs, though none is expressly named. As with the list just closed, it is generally easy to identify the particular martyr whom the writer has in mind. Thus the statement that **others were broken on the wheel, refusing to accept release, that they might obtain a better resurrection** is almost certainly a reference to the martyrdom of Eleazar, a godly scribe who perished under Antiochus Epiphanes rather than eat the swine's flesh which was offered to him.[3] The punishment seems to have consisted in stretching the victim on a drum-like frame and beating him to death. The story goes that the royal officers, moved with compassion and sympathy for the old man, offered to allow him to bring lawful food with him and to eat that, claiming that it was swine's flesh, but that he, **refusing to accept** the **release** thus offered, gladly laid down his life for the sake of the truth. **Scoffs and scourging, chains and imprisonment,** were the lot of many others in those days of cruel persecution, but the writer may have had in mind some incident in the Old Testament—e.g. the sufferings of Jeremiah.[4] Tradition said that Isaiah was **sawn in two** with wooden saws in the reign of Manasseh, and the stoning may be that of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada.[5] It will be noted that the translation above omits a word where the older English versions have 'were tempted.' It is probable that a verb stood here originally, but it is quite uncertain what it was—among the many suggestions made we may note 'were mutilated,' 'were impaled,' 'were burned.' The latter would suit the tradition as to the death inflicted on some of the martyrs in

[1] 1 Kings xvii. 17–24. [2] 2 Kings iv. 18–37. [3] Cp. 2 Macc. vi. 18 ff.
[4] Cp. Jer. xx. 2, xxxviii. [5] Cp. 2 Chron. xxiv. 21.

the Maccabean age. That men should be cut to pieces was so common a fate in times of persecution that we need not look for a special historic example.

Death was not the portion of all who had to suffer for their religion. There were men **of whom the world was not worthy,** whom the world yet cast out, and compelled to flee for their lives to the hills, where they made their homes as best they could in **caves and gullies.** This is said to have been the lot of the followers of Isaiah in the reign of Manasseh, and it was certainly true of many of the faithful during the great persecution which took place in the middle of the second century B.C., when Antiochus Epiphanes was trying to stamp out the Jewish faith.

Here, then, is a list of martyrs which is far more impressive than the record of the heroes who won great triumphs through their faith. That men should remove mountains is no small thing, and is eloquent testimony to the power that dwells in them, but it is a yet greater and nobler evidence of faith that they should be willing to endure the frightful tortures which were inflicted on them in the days that preceded the Maccabean rising. These things could hardly have been borne at all—and it is recorded of many of the sufferers that they joyfully embraced their fate—unless the victims had seen before them the evidence of a brighter and a better life, which fidelity would win, but which apostasy would forfeit. It is essentially this aspect of the case which entitles these men, perhaps more than the others named, to a place on the roll of the heroes of faith.

They all won their record for faith, but the Promise they did 39
not obtain. God had something better in store for us ; 40
He would not have them perfected apart from us. xii.
Therefore, with all this host of witnesses* encircling us, we 1
must strip off every handicap, strip off sin with its clinging
folds, to run our appointed course steadily, our eyes fixed 2
upon Jesus as the pioneer and the perfection of faith—upon

* The Greek word is beginning already to hover round the special sense of 'martyrs' but the broader sense is obviously required here.

Jesus who, in order to reach His own appointed joy, steadily endured the cross, thinking nothing of its shame, and is now *seated at the right hand* of the throne of God.
3 **Compare Him who steadily endured all that hostility from sinful men, so as to keep your own hearts from fainting and failing.**

It is characteristic of this Epistle that the author seems always to have a practical application for every subject with which he deals. The splendid roll of honour which fills ch. xi. has a meaning and a value, a challenge and an inspiration, for all time. Magnificent as the achievement and the endurance of the past have been, they yet lack something, for they are not in themselves complete. No age in history can be understood by itself alone ; each must be interpreted in the light of the developments which follow from it. Its meaning must always be obscure until it is manifested in the results which accrue. The significant tendencies and movements are seldom those which are most obvious and which loom largest to its contemporaries ; and it often happens that events which seem at the time to have little or no importance prove to be the roots from which great issues spring. Few, if any, of the martyrs counted for much in the eyes of their contemporaries, yet it was in them that the seed of the great future was planted and kept alive.

That for which these heroes had fought and these martyrs had died was the revelation of God in Judaism. It was a great evolutionary process, unique in human history. No other people could show a similar growth from a comparatively low religion and a very imperfect conception of God to such heights as Israel had reached when Jesus came into the world. Man's spiritual history can offer other examples of men and women who had laid down their lives rather than abandon the truth, but nowhere else in pre-Christian times are we presented with a considerable element in a nation so passionately consecrated to a unique faith as to surrender all else—even life itself—rather than be false to it. The persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes is partly to be explained on this ground. He was

an enthusiastic missionary of the higher culture, as embodied in Greek thought, and the resistance made by the Jewish religious conscience was utterly unintelligible to him. He could interpret it only as wilful and rebellious opposition to his wishes, and, therefore, strove to crush it by the only means in his power.

Yet, with all the glory of the Jewish faith, it was but a preparation for the still grander revelation which had come to the Christian writer and readers of this Epistle in the life and death of Jesus. The martyrs had died for the Law ; the Maccabean warriors had fought for the right to worship according to the old Covenant. And this, in itself, in spite of its sublimity, was no more than an adumbration of better things to come. Far back in the past the **Promise** had been made, and was still valid, but it remained no more than a **Promise,** and the fulfilment was not yet. The spirit which made men cling to the ancestral religion at all costs was **faith,** man's best effort in face of the imperfect and the incomplete. These men were legitimate heirs of Abraham ; like their great ancestor they **went forth, although they did not know where** they were **to go.** It is true that they thought they knew, and they lived bravely up to the light that they had, but even so the full meaning of that for which they fought and died was hidden from them. **Faith** was theirs in abundance, **but the Promise they did not obtain.**

God had something better in store, the fuller revelation in Jesus. Without that which these men had seen and clung to, He would have been impossible ; without Him their knowledge and vision were incomplete. Christianity can be appreciated only in the light of Judaism ; Judaism cannot be fully understood except in Christianity. As St. Paul put it, in the history of human religion **all things** are **gathered up in Christ,**[1] brought to a head in Jesus.

Thus the long line of Hebrew saints points in the right direction, but does not reach its end till it culminates in the followers of Jesus. The writer feels himself to be in the direct succession to these men whose acts of **faith** he has enumerated, but he has reached a height from which they were necessarily

[1] Eph. i. 10.

debarred. There is a unity of revelation and of discovery—the two sides of the same process of the development of the knowledge of God—and though the appearance of Jesus marks a new stage (and that the highest), it does not break the chain. **Apart from** the Christian believer, the Jewish heroes of **faith** were incomplete, with Him they were **perfected.**

Hence there arise a challenge and an appeal. The Christian stands in the arena, ready to run a race. On all sides there throngs about the course a **host of witnesses,** and they are men who are not ignorant of the task set before the competitor, but have themselves been crowned as successful runners of the course of **faith.** Each of them has, in his own age and in his own way, run his section of the great 'relay race,' and, having handed on the torch to his successor, has joined the multitude of interested spectators and skilled judges. First must the contestant **strip off every handicap,** lay down everything which might add to his weight and so burden him, for the race is not to be completed without the most strenuous exertion, and a single ounce of unnecessary matter may make all the difference between success and failure. The handicap may belong to the physical world, and appear as a loved possession or a bodily pleasure, or it may, more subtly, lie in the realm of the mind and of the spirit. But, whatever it may be, and wherever it may rest upon the runner, it must go, or the risk of defeat will be too great. In particular men are handicapped by **sin.** There is no reference to any particular **sin,** and we misunderstand the writer if we confine his words to a special form of temptation (different, possibly, with each individual) to which a man may, by constitution or position, be peculiarly exposed. It is **sin** in general, **sin** of any kind, **sin** of all kinds that he has in view, and he thinks of it as resembling the long loose robe which men of his day used to wear. This, **with its clinging folds,** will inevitably entangle itself about his limbs and trip him up, or, at the very least, fatally impede his progress. All must go, and the race must be run with **every** possible **handicap** cast aside.

All this is preliminary. When the race begins there are two dangers against which the runner must especially guard. He must not allow his attention to be distracted by anything

either on or off the course. A runner dare not even look behind him to see how near his competitors are to him, still less is it safe for him to look to one side. His **eyes** must be **fixed upon** the goal, and never for an instant must his attention turn to any other object. So he who runs this spiritual race must keep his **eyes fixed upon Jesus as the pioneer and the perfection of faith.** On Him must he be absolutely concentrated, all his life must be lived with Jesus in view, and every action and thought must be in some way related to Him. For He is the **pioneer and the perfection of faith.** The former of these two words is that with which we have already met in ii. 10, where we had the phrase **Pioneer of salvation.** As we saw in discussing that passage, the word may mean ' author ' or ' originator ' rather than ' **Pioneer** ' in the sense in which that word is commonly used. It is quite true that Jesus has shown the road of **faith** as no other has done, but the thought in the writer's mind is rather that He is the originator of **faith.** It began with Him ; He brought it into existence for the Christian, and He must be the starting-point for every one who claims His name. But He is also the goal, and the end which the runner has before him is to attain to Christ. The thought passes rapidly from the crucified Jesus—with whom Christian **faith** began—to the glorified Jesus—with whom Christian **faith** will end. For what is set before us is the ideal of reaching Him as He is, and sharing in His triumph, an achievement open only to those who share in His humiliation and Cross. Unlike the men of old who **did not know where** they were **to go,** the man who takes Jesus as his Saviour has a clear prospect before him. The Christian life must be begun, continued, and ended in Christ.

The other danger in the race itself is that the runner may find it too exhausting, and either fall by the way or give up the contest. For it may be long, and, long or short, it is always arduous. There is need of perseverance, of the power of resistance and of endurance—that is what is meant by ' **running steadily.**' It is not merely a sudden burst, a ' sprint ' that is required, but the grim and resolute determination of the long-distance runner. It is far easier to rise to

a sudden occasion, to achieve victory in a single grand moment, than to endure for years the toil and strain of an exhausting contest, and it is the qualities which make for success in the latter that are needed by the Christian athlete.

Further, we note that, in this last matter, Jesus Himself serves as an example. As there is an **appointed course** for the Christian, a goal set before him, so Jesus had **His own appointed joy,** which was realized only when He took His seat *at the right hand* **of the throne of God.** The difficulties which Jesus had to face were greater than those of any other, for they included the **Cross.** Yet He **steadily endured,** showing in a supreme degree those very qualities that are demanded of His followers. Even of the **shame,** the sneers and mockery, the degradation of the Cross, He thought **nothing,** but rather despised it, refusing to allow it to influence Him in any way. And so, since His trial was more searching and deadly than any other can be, He has attained a unique triumph and a unique reward.

Nearly nineteen centuries have passed since this passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews was penned. Yet we, to-day, may take our stand where the writer stood, and we may adopt his words and his spirit as our own. In point of time, Moses stood nearer to Jesus than we do; the period that elapsed between the time when Israel first came into being and the appearance of Jesus was shorter by some centuries than that which separates us from the first Christian generations. The great roll of the heroes of **faith** has been enormously lengthened, and we can add, as being in the same long tradition, all who have fought and suffered for the sake of Christ. **The host of witnesses encircling us** is immeasurably greater than that which the writer of this Epistle envisaged, and the appeal and the challenge are so much the stronger. It is true that we do not claim any knowledge of God developing beyond our Lord, for we should agree that in Him God has said the last word that can be said to mankind. But though we cannot look for a greater revelation *than* Jesus, we have a right to assume that, through the ages, there has been a greater revelation *of* Him. Generation after generation has known

Him personally, and has been able to use and to add to the knowledge of all its predecessors. Century after century men have studied the historic Person, and His picture is clearer to us to-day than it has ever been before. He is the same ; it is we who change, and, in changing, should draw nearer to Him.

On us, then, there lies the same responsibility that rested on these ancient Christians. God **would not have them perfected apart from us,** and it behoves us to accept the implications and the duties inextricably bound up with our privileges. We, too, **must strip off every handicap, strip off sin with its clinging folds,** and **run our appointed course steadily, our eyes fixed upon Jesus as the pioneer and the perfection of faith.** In a sense we also are as Abraham, and do not **know where** we are going. What Jesus will be like when man fully knows Him, what God will appear to be when the world knows all that Jesus has yet to teach us about Him, we cannot tell. But we do know that our starting-point and our goal are one, and that whatever the final outcome may be, when our race reaches the highest point attainable by the finite, what we shall find in the end is Jesus.

Jesus, then, is the great example of one who has run the race with **eyes fixed upon** the goal. But He has also shown the world how to **endure steadily.** We may suspect that the writer is once more generalizing from some familiar narrative of the life and death of Jesus. Hitherto the references seem to have been, for the most part, to His final passion, but it is clear that current tradition had much to say also about His life, ministry, and teaching. The record in the Gospels which have come down to us shows that the vindictiveness and hatred which won their triumph in the Cross were not of sudden growth, but had been present almost from the first, and had steadily gained ground. It must have been, as the Marcan narrative suggests, near the beginning of His ministry that opposition first was manifested, and, save for those rare moments when Jesus was alone with His disciples, He had to do His work in an atmosphere of mistrust, suspicion, and hatred. Yet He persevered, and, without **fainting and failing,**

kept on His way, and **steadily endured all that hostility from sinful men.**

So the writer exhorts his readers to set the experience of Jesus alongside of their own, and to compare the two. They will find that what they had to **endure** is immeasurably less than the burden laid upon Him. If they are faced with the danger of exhaustion, and are tempted to relax their efforts and to let their limbs droop, they may win a fresh courage by considering what their Master had to bear, and the way in which He bore it. He will be, not merely their goal, but also their pattern and their inspiration.

4 **You have not had to shed blood yet in the struggle against**
5 **sin. And have you forgotten the word of appeal that reasons with you as sons ?—**

My son, never make light of the Lord's discipline,
never faint under His reproofs ;
6 *for the Lord disciplines the man He loves,*
and scourges every son He receives.

7 **It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating**
you as sons ; for where is the son who is not disciplined by
8 **his father ? Discipline is the portion of all ; if you get**
9 **no discipline, then you are not sons but bastards. Why, we had fathers of our flesh to discipline us, and we yielded to them ! Shall we not far more submit to the Father of**
10 **our spirits, and so live ? For while their discipline was only for a time, and inflicted at their pleasure, He disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His own**
11 **holiness. Discipline always seems for the time to be a thing of pain, not of joy ; but those who are trained by it reap the fruit of it afterwards in the peace of an upright life.**

With a rather sudden transition of thought, the writer turns to the meaning of pain. His readers have, clearly, suffered from persecution, though it has not been carried to extremes, and none of them has been put to death. The reflections which follow are introduced by the reference to the sufferings of Jesus in the preceding paragraph. He had

shed His blood in the struggle against sin. It would seem that the harried Church was tempted to complain that its members had not deserved the treatment which they had received, and were disposed to be rebellious towards the God who had permitted it. In answer to this, the writer has something to say about the value of punishment as a moral discipline. His position is a familiar one, and is almost a commonplace with thinkers and philosophers in every age and people, offering a far less profound contribution to the solution and settlement of the problem of pain than is suggested, e.g., by ii. 10. But here the question is narrowed down to the suffering which is inflicted as a remedial or an ameliorating measure. Citing Prov. iii. 11, 12 from the LXX, the writer argues that, so far from being a ground for complaint, the trouble which God has allowed them to endure is an evidence that He regards them as His **sons,** a point which they seem to have overlooked. It was a common belief in the ancient world that the training of children could be carried out only with free use of the rod, and it is a striking fact that both the Greek and the Hebrew words for ' education ' mean also ' punishment.'

The writer's reply, then, to the question, ' Why does God let us suffer thus ? ' is simply, ' He **is treating you as sons.**' Chastisement is the universal lot of children, if they have fathers who are really interested in their welfare. The only boys who can escape discipline are the **bastards,** for their fathers take no interest in them, and may even be unaware of their existence. The very fact that these Christians are called upon to endure hardships shows that they have a **Father,** and that He cares for them.[1] A parent who did no more than bestow on his children the pleasant things for which they ask, would be failing in his duty, and would be doing very grave injury to their characters. The **discipline** of God, rightly understood, is a mark of His favour, and cannot fail to be of advantage in the end to those who have to bear it.

A further step is taken, with that *a fortiori* argument which seems to be a favourite form of reasoning with this author.

[1] It is significant that this is the only reference in *Hebrews* to the Fatherhood of God.

The earthly **father** inflicted his **discipline** only during the minority of the child, and its object was to secure the best results merely for the brief span of its earthly life ; it **was only for a time.** Further, the human parent might make mistakes, or he might simply be giving way to bad temper, or might be punishing the child simply in order to satisfy himself in some other way. His punishments are **inflicted at** his **pleasure.** But the heavenly **Father of our spirits** is all-knowing and all-loving—' too wise to err, and too good to be unkind.' That which He imposes cannot fail of its purpose, and must end in the improvement of the sufferer. There is in all of us some uncleanness, some spiritual impurity, and this can be purged away only by fire. But, when the process is finished, then a man becomes fit for the company of God, for he shares in God's **own holiness.**

No one enjoys pain ; it would not be pain if he did. But he may be induced to tolerate it, and even to welcome it, if he knows that it will result to his advantage. And suffering inflicted educationally by God means that His children, thus favoured, will **reap the fruit of it afterwards in the peace of an upright life.** This does not mean merely, or even primarily, that they will enjoy freedom from sorrow, anxiety, or distress. The writer evidently has in his mind the wide-spread oriental conception lying behind the word ' peace.' It is not simply the absence of war, or of other trouble, it is a more positive blessing, a fulness and richness of life, which implies general welfare. With this in mind, any Christian ought willingly to **submit,** and should patiently endure whatever discipline his heavenly **Father** sees fit to lay upon him.

12 So *up with your listless hands! Strengthen your weak knees!*
13 **And** *make straight paths for your feet* **to walk in. You must not let the lame get dislocated, but rather make**
14 **them whole. Aim at peace with all—and at that consecration without which no one will ever see the Lord ;**
15 **see to it that no one misses the grace of God,** *that no root of bitterness grows up to be a trouble* **by contaminating all**
16 **the rest of you ; that no one turns to sexual vice or to a**

profane life as Esau did—Esau, who for a single meal
parted with his birthright. **You know how later on, when he** 17
wanted to obtain his inheritance of blessing, he was set aside ; he got no chance to repent, though he tried for it with tears.

What has just been said leads the writer on to think of the immediate situation and needs of the Church which he is addressing. Unlike St. Paul, the author of Hebrews has had very little indeed to say on the condition of his correspondents, and we are left to deduce their position from the exhortations which he gives them. It is clear from this passage that, though the Church was in the main healthy, yet there were points of weakness on which a friendly critic might fasten. The preceding appeal for endurance and perseverance under suffering has not been merely general or academic ; it has been intended to have a practical bearing on the actual situation of the readers. There are ***listless hands*** and ***weak knees*** among them (the language is derived from Isa. xxxv. 3), and there is the danger, not merely that the less vigorous members may ruin themselves, but that they may infect others also with their own diseases. There is, too, a spirit of disagreement among the members, and their lack of complete harmony may end in serious disunion. Possibly there are symptoms of grave moral evils, which need to be checked at the outset, before they can cause serious harm to the whole body.

In such circumstances it might seem that two courses are open, that of surgery and that of medicine. A harsher spirit might have recommended the removal of the offending member, but our author takes a milder view. The **hands** are dangling loosely, let them be given the strength which will make it possible for them to be held straight up. The **knees** are bent with weakness, let these too be supplied with the power to sustain the body erect. Another stumble might result in complete dislocation; let the path be smoothed, so that there is no obstacle over which the **lame** may trip and fall. Let the spirit of **peace** be cultivated—the term, apparently, used here in its narrower sense—in company with the whole community.

To aim at peace with all is to make a united effort to secure a permanent harmony. And, as the last of the positive exhortations, comes the injunction to **aim at that consecration without which no one will ever see the Lord.** This is not the first time that we have had a reference in the Epistle to the beatific vision. Moses, for instance, is mentioned as one **who saw the King Invisible.**[1] We may almost say that this is one of the essentials of true religion, as the writer understands it. For, in one of its aspects, **faith** itself is the power to penetrate the veil of sensible matter, and become directly aware of the presence of God. It is a form of—or rather an expression for—'God-consciousness,' which may, not unfairly, be called the goal of all the highest spiritual life. And this can be attained only by those who are **consecrated,** made holy, purified. As, under the old Covenant, access to the Temple (and, indeed, to any type of worship) was barred to one who had about him anything which might carry ceremonial pollution, so it is impossible for a man to enter the full presence of God unless he is free from spiritual contamination. There is but one window to the soul, and if that be dimmed, clouded, or foul, there is no means whereby the glory of God may be perceived. We think inevitably of that great saying of Jesus, '**Blessed are the pure in heart! they will see God.**'[2]

Now follows a warning. The Church must **see to it that no one misses the grace of God**—the word is that which appears also in iv. 1, and the danger is further explained by a quotation from the LXX of Deut. xxix. 18 '*that no root of bitterness grows up to be a trouble.*' Sin is like a poisonous plant, which may affect others besides itself **by contaminating all the rest.** As an illustration of what he means, the writer refers to **Esau,** and presents him in an even worse light than that in which he appears in the stories of Genesis. This is due in part to Jewish tradition, which ascribed to him many forms of iniquity, perhaps because he was the ancestor of the hated Edomites. We can well believe that the pious Jew would think all manner of evil of one from whom the Herods might claim descent. It is a little difficult for the modern Western

[1] xi. 27. [2] Matt. v. 8.

mind to follow the grounds on which Israelite thought so strongly and so universally condemned Esau's action when for a single meal *he parted with his birthright*. His argument, 'better to live as the younger son than to die as the elder,' has a certain specious justification. But, when we consider the ancient oriental point of view as a whole, the feeling becomes more intelligible. It has its roots in an age and among a people whose thoughts were concentrated on what we may call 'corporate personality.' The individual was of minor importance as compared with the group to which he belonged, and it was the latter which formed the true unit alike in political, in social, and in religious life. Personal immortality, for instance, was an idea which came very late into Israelite thought; a man lived after death only in his descendants, and his supreme privilege and duty was to continue unimpaired the family to which he belonged. As the genealogies handed down to us in Genesis show, it was through the eldest son that the proper descent was reckoned, for though a man might beget other sons and daughters, it was his firstborn who continued the true line and handed it on to his posterity. To discard this was to abandon, not only the highest of privileges, but also the most pressing of responsibilities—to make 'the great refusal.'

It is, of course, strictly impossible to *part with* a *birthright*. That is a fact in the past, and what has once taken place cannot be undone. Men have spiritual privileges which come to them out of ages gone by which are theirs whether they will or no, and each carries with it a responsibility. The attempt to get rid of these privileges, to refuse to take up the burden of them, is a deadly peril to the soul. They are inalienable, woven into the very fabric of a man's being, and, if he casts them from him, he is sacrificing something that is vital to him, and, in a very real sense, committing spiritual suicide. That is what the sin of Esau means.

The illustration of Esau brings the writer back to the most terrible of all his doctrines—the impossibility of a second restoration. When the time came for the sons of Isaac to receive that paternal blessing which should determine for all

time the fate of themselves and of their descendants, Esau's opportunity was gone, and he was still the younger son. He was not allowed even a **chance to repent**, passionately as he sought it. He wept, but **tears** are not necessarily true repentance; they may be due to a merely selfish regret for some desirable possession that has been lost. We seem here to gain some insight into the thought that lies behind the writer's doctrine. Sin such as that of Esau actually damages the fabric of the soul, mutilates it, and deprives it of the power to exercise the functions of normal humanity. What the sinner has done is to destroy in himself the very faculty of repentance, and, much as he would wish to use it, he cannot, for he has thrown it away. He has, we may repeat, committed spiritual suicide.

18 **You have not come to what you can touch, to** *flames of fire*, **to**
19 *mist* **and** *gloom* **and** *stormy blasts*, *to the blare of a trumpet*
and to a Voice **whose words made those who heard it refuse**
20 **to hear another syllable (for they could not bear the com-**
mand, *If even a beast touches the mountain, it must be*
21 *stoned*)**—indeed, so awful was the sight that Moses said,**
22 *I am terrified and aghast.* **You have come to mount Sion,**
the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to
23 **myriads of angels in festal gathering, to the assembly of**
the first-born registered in heaven, to the God of all as
24 **judge, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus**
who mediates the new covenant, and to the sprinkled
blood whose message is nobler than Abel's.

In the noble and impressive finale with which the subject of the Epistle closes, the first part (printed above) is devoted to a statement of facts, the second, verses 25–29, to the conclusion and appeal to be drawn from those facts. The actual situation is, in accordance with the principles which underlie the writer's thought, presented as a contrast between the conditions which governed the giving of the old Covenant and those implied in the new. The writer goes back to Sinai, and enumerates those features which, to his mind, especially stand out from the narrative.

The dominant tones of the picture are darkness and terror. Sinai was a mountain which men **can touch**—it seems better to take this word independently, rather than with the **fire**—and, therefore, belonged to the inferior of the two worlds, that of matter. Because it was tangible, palpable, it lacked the possibility of a higher spiritual vitality, and all the manifestations which accompanied the revelation are perceptible by physical sense—blazing *fire*, murky smoke, deep *gloom*, hurricane, *the blare of a trumpet and a Voice*. In Deut. v. 22–25 it is recorded that Moses received the Decalogue to the accompaniment of fire and smoke and murky darkness and a loud voice, and that the elders of Israel then came to Moses in terror, and besought him to carry on the conversations with God on their behalf, since it would mean death to them to hear the voice of God again. A further danger appeared in the sanctity of the mountain, which was so great that none might touch it, whether man or beast ; the penalty for violation of this order was death, the victim being either stoned or shot with arrows.[1] The author, while singling out the essential features of the story, sometimes allows himself to fall into a certain confusion or inaccuracy in details, for it was not the unapproachability of the mountain which terrified Israel, but the sights and sounds which emanated from it. A like inexactness appears in verse 21, since the terror of Moses was aroused, not by the phenomena of the mountain, but by the worship of the golden calf, and the divine anger called forth thereby.[2] But minor slips of this kind do not detract from the correctness of the general picture. The appeal at Sinai was to man's fears and sense of awe.

Over against this stands the contrast, light against darkness, joy against terror, an offer of salvation against a threat of destruction. Here we are no longer in the lower world of matter, but in the higher one of spiritual realities and values. Instead of Sinai we have **Sion**, not the earthly hill, but the heavenly home of God. It is still further described as the **city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, lying outside of and beyond this earthly realm. The time is a particular

[1] Cp. Exod. xix. 12–13. [2] Cp. Deut. ix. 12–21.

one—it may be that the writer is thinking of the supreme moment in which the sacrifice of Christ was consummated. There is a **festal gathering,** such as the Greeks would have to celebrate a special occasion, and tens of thousands of angels are assembled together. It is not clear from the Greek forms used whether the **festal gathering** refers properly to the angels or to the redeemed of men, but it makes little difference to which we assign it. The whole scene is one of glory and of triumph, shared, not only by the **angels,** but also by those who can claim salvation through Christ. We think of Socrates' hope that, after death, he might associate with the heroes of old, men far nobler than any living in his own day. But Socrates would not have thought of them as **registered in heaven,** though the conception, taken over from the later Jewish apocalyptic, was familiar to the early Church. Jesus had spoken of the names written in heaven,[1] while the writer of the Apocalypse describes the dwellers in the New Jerusalem as those '*whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*'[2]

The list proceeds in ascending order. Not only are the angels to be found in the **heavenly Jerusalem,** together with the **first-born,** but God Himself is there. This time He is thought of as the **judge,** not in the sense merely of one who condemns, but rather as He who alone can rightly appraise the value of men. In harmony with this conception the forensic idea is applied to the heroes and saints of old, although they have already been mentioned, and they are described as **just men,** i.e. as men on whom the supreme **judge** has passed a verdict of approval. That judgement they had won during their lifetime, by their deeds and their **faith,** but there had still been something lacking to them, for God **would not have them perfected apart** from the fuller revelation of the new Covenant. They have been, as it were, waiting for the final revelation of God, sharing only through their **faith** in the salvation ordained for the world in the sacrifice of Christ. Now, **in these days at the end,**[3] they too, like their successors still on earth, receive the full reward of their spiritual excellence,

[1] Cp. Luke x. 20. [2] Rev. xxi. 27. [3] i. 2.

and are at last made perfect. We have here a thought akin to that which gave rise to the doctrine of the descent of Christ into the lower world, which is foreshadowed in certain forms of Jewish eschatology, and, while occasionally referred to in the New Testament,[1] reaches its full development only in medieval theology. We need not, however, assume that the doctrine was formulated in the mind of the writer, or he would probably have mentioned it. In any case he would not have placed the righteous in hell, as, for instance, Dante does, to await their deliverance.

Finally we have Jesus Himself, and His place is summed up in the fact that He mediates the new covenant. He must of necessity take the highest position, since it is through Him and His blood that men can be there at all. We almost feel that the central message of the Epistle is summed up in this phrase, and our minds are thrown back at once over the permanently valid elements in the writer's argument. In xi. 4 we have had a reference to Abel, whose blood cried from the ground, and of whom our author says that he is speaking to us still. The blood of Jesus also speaks, but there is a difference. That of Abel cried for vengeance ; that of Jesus proclaims forgiveness. Truly its message is the nobler.

See that you do not refuse to listen to His voice. For if they 25
failed to escape, who refused to listen to their instructor
upon earth, much less shall we escape, if we discard Him
who speaks from heaven. Then His voice shook the earth, 26
but now the assurance is, *once again I will make heaven*
as well as earth to quake. **That phrase,** *once again*, **denotes** 27
the removal of what is shaken (as no more than created),
to leave only what stands unshaken. Therefore let us 28
render thanks* that we get an unshaken realm ; and in
this way let us worship God acceptably—but with godly 29
fear† and awe, for our *God* **is indeed a** *consuming fire.*

* Reading ἔχωμεν. † Like Jesus himself (v. 7).

[1] e.g. 1 Pet. iii. 19.

In the last paragraph we had a summary of the actual facts as the writer sees them, and now he proceeds to draw from these facts his solemn warning for his readers. This is quite characteristic of him, and we have noted his method several times already, and, here as elsewhere, he employs the *a fortiori* argument. We have once more the contrasts between the visible, material world, and that which is unseen and spiritual, and between the Law mediated through Moses and the message of salvation given through Jesus. The old Covenant was transmitted to men through a human **instructor,** for Moses had received as a divine oracle that which he handed on to his people. He and his message alike, then, belonged to that order which is found only **upon earth.** Yet the Israelites refused to listen to him, and were punished by their failure to enter the promised land. On the other hand we have Jesus, speaking **from heaven,** and He, together with His message, is to be assigned to the spiritual and eternal realm. The penalty in the one case was the loss of the earthly rest which was promised to Israel; in the second case it is the failure to win the heavenly rest which remains for the people of God.

An apocalyptic tone now enters the writer's thought. When the Law was given on Sinai, the **voice** of God **shook the earth.** This is, apparently, the writer's own deduction from the text, for the version before him spoke, in Exod. xix. 18, of the people, and not of the earth, as being shaken. But he may well have regarded the people as being typical and emblematic of all physical creation, in order to mark the contrast between the first shaking and the second. For he has before him a verse in Haggai[1] which speaks, in eschatological fashion, of a second shaking—'*once again I will make heaven as well as earth to quake.*' His thought is easily followed. The former shaking accompanied the entry of divine Law into the world, but the latter must see the end of all material creation. **Once** and only **once again** will the universe know this experience, and that final catastrophe must mean the end of all that which can be brought to an end. The material universe is finite.

[1] Hag. ii. 6.

It had a beginning in time and it will, therefore, have an end in time. What is **no more than created** is perishable, and will perish, it is only the spiritual world, the uncreated which can stand **unshaken.** As St. Paul put it, **he who sows for his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, and he who sows for the Spirit will reap life eternal from the Spirit.**[1] Sooner or later —and to the first Christian generations the time seemed very near—the material universe must come to a catastrophic end, and only the spiritual could endure. When that happened, he who discards **Him who speaks from heaven,** through **the sprinkled blood whose message is nobler than Abel's,** must necessarily share in the ruin of that material world in which alone he lives. It is to be noted that, like St. Paul, the writer makes no mention of eternal suffering as the punishment reserved for the unbeliever, but rather, if we may judge from his language, contemplates the annihilation of those who **discard** Jesus. If men **refuse to listen to His voice** as He **speaks from heaven,** they necessarily shut themselves out from the heavenly realm and confine themselves to that of earth. It is inevitable that they should share in the ruin and final destruction of that earth.

In spite of its intensely serious tone, the warning here has far less of the element of threat in it than it has elsewhere, and the writer, as if he were satisfied of the fidelity and ultimate perseverance of his readers, proceeds at once to exhort them that they should **render thanks.** They do belong to the spiritual realm, they have accepted Christ, they have passed from death unto life, and so have entered into the **unshaken realm.** We cannot help feeling that our author's conception of God is not quite that of Jesus. Instead of a loving and sympathetic Father, we have an omnipotent Lord, always demanding humble submission and full recognition of His mastery. To **worship God acceptably,** men must concentrate on thanksgiving, and, even while they attest their joy, they must maintain an attitude of **godly fear and awe.** The first of these two words has, indeed, already been applied to Jesus, and it has been asserted that it was

[1] Gal. vi. 8.

this virtue which secured Him a hearing with His Father, when He poured out His soul in the bitterness of His agony.[1] Yet it is, perhaps, as well that we should be reminded of the sterner elements in the life of the soul. There is some danger lest, in our anxiety to present God to ourselves and to others as Love, we should forget the moral implications of goodness. True love does not confuse good and evil, it does not fail to distinguish between truth and falsehood, it does not say, 'Peace, peace!' where there is no peace. It sternly faces reality, and, though it cost a broken heart, yet it will recognize that sin is a more terrible thing than destruction. If man insists on sin, if he deliberately chooses evil rather than good, if of set purpose he turns his back on the proffered salvation, then God Himself is helpless to save him. Unless He is to be false to His own being, and to admit a self-contradiction in His very essence, the law of Truth, of Righteousness, of Love itself, demands that He should be also *a consuming fire*. It is with this solemn yet splendid note that the Epistle proper closes.

VII. xiii. 1–25 : Appendix and Salutations

The writer's task has now been brought to an end, but before penning the usual salutations, he has one or two remarks to make. These are, for the most part, disconnected, and show no attempt at orderly sequence, though there is a more or less continuous train of thought running through verses 8–16. Except in the passage mentioned, the questions raised deal mainly with Christian morality, though there is no extended argument or even exhortation, and the various points are mentioned somewhat perfunctorily, almost as though they were commonplaces of Christian letters which the writer felt that he could not omit.

xiii.

1–2**Let your brotherly love continue. Never forget to be hospitable, for by hospitality some have entertained angels unawares.**

[1] Verse 7.

Remember prisoners, as if you were in prison yourselves; 3
remember those who are being ill-treated, since you too
are in the body.

The first exhortation concerns feelings and relations which should exist between Christians. **Brotherly love** was one of the recognized virtues of the ancient world, and, in the Church, was naturally extended to include in its operation all Christians. **Hospitality** is recommended on the ground that **some have entertained angels unawares.** The writer is doubtless thinking of Abraham,[1] possibly, also, of Gideon[2] or Manoah,[3] perhaps, even, of Tobit. But this virtue needed no special examples from the Old Testament, for it was a universally recognized duty in the ancient world. In pre-Roman days a stranger was always liable to suffer in a place where he had no recognized standing or official position. In certain circumstances he might take up his residence in a new city and be formally enrolled as a resident without full civic rights. If he were simply paying a short visit, he would be safest under the protection of some citizen, who would answer for him in case of need. It was quite usual in ancient Greece for men to have ' guest-friends ' in several cities, and in each their position was secured, the obligations and privileges being mutual. With the unification of the world under Roman government, the need for an arrangement of this kind became somewhat less pressing, but the unpleasantness, inadequacy, and expense of the inns made it desirable for a traveller to stay with friends if he could. In the early Church the principle seems to have been greatly extended, and we hear of Christians who wandered in the ministry from one place to another, always entertained by their brethren. An early manual of Christian instruction, known as the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, contains a reference to such travelling evangelists, and Lucian satirized the gullibility of the poor Christians, who were in his day ready to house and feed for a time any fraudulent tramp who could convince them of his Christianity. It is not very likely that any Christian in those early days ever forgot **to be hospitable.**

[1] Gen. xviii. [2] Judges vi. 11–24. [3] Judges xiii. 2–23.

Ancient conditions also made it most desirable that **prisoners** should receive some care from their friends. Already, in x. 34, we have had a reference to the sympathetic care shown by the writer's correspondents to their friends in prison. There it seemed as if the victims had been imprisoned as Christians during some local persecution. But the reference here is probably more general, and would include any who were condemned to imprisonment for debt or for any other cause. Charity to prisoners is recommended as an exhibition of brotherly sympathy, and as an illustration of the golden rule. Christians should be able to put themselves in the place of their friends, **as if** they themselves **were in prison,** and so should know exactly what form and type of ministry would be **most** serviceable and acceptable.

The point of the last injunction is not so obvious as that of the others. We can quite understand that Christians ought to **remember those who are being ill-treated,** for that would seem to be a natural duty for them. But it is not clear that the motive suggested would be very powerful. The fact that a man is **in the body** does not seem likely to produce sympathy for people who are **ill-treated,** and we are almost inclined to suspect that the word had a special meaning here, being not so much **ill-treated** as ' diseased,' ' sick.' It is certainly not a common term in this sense, but the writer seems a little inclined to avoid the obvious and straightforward forms of expression, though, it must be admitted, we have no close parallel to the present instance. But, if we can take the word in that sense (as the English A.V. seems to do), we can understand that the writer is exhorting his friends to remember that, since they too have bodies, they too may be subject to similar afflictions.

4 **Let marriage be held in honour by all, and keep the marriage-bed unstained. God will punish the vicious and adulterous.**

It is worth noting how small a place this subject takes in this Epistle. What we have in this verse is evidently a commonplace injunction, which is not called forth by any

special need in the Church or Churches addressed. We have a strong contrast to the position suggested in 1 Cor., where this form of sin was especially rife—as, indeed, it was almost all over the heathen world. This, in itself, suggests that the original readers of the Epistle belonged to a community of Jewish Christians, or, at least, that they had inherited the Jewish tradition, for the standard of sexual morality was very much higher among Jews than it was anywhere else in the ancient world, where fornication and even adultery were taken almost as matters of course.

Keep your life free from the love of money ; be content with 5
what you have, for He has said,
Never will I fail you, never will I forsake you.
So that we can say confidently, 6
The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.
What can men do to me ?

Love of money was one of the vices condemned by pagan philosophy even more strongly than by Jewish pietism. Indeed the Jew had, in the ancient world, a bad reputation in this respect. The context, however, suggests the language of Jesus as recorded in Matt. vi. 19–34. The motive for hoarding is not simply desire for wealth in itself, but fear of destitution, and the temptation is met by a reference to Deut. xxxi. 6, 8 and Ps. cxviii. 6. Both passages refer originally to the fear of enemies, but the general principle may apply also to the dread of want. Possibly the writer knew of the tradition which ascribed to Jesus an exhortation on this subject.

Remember your leaders, the men who spoke the word of God 7
to you ; look back upon the close of their career, and copy their faith.

There is no obvious connexion between this and the preceding verses. For the **leaders** are not commended for the purity of their lives, or for their freedom from avarice, but for their

faith. It is clear that the writer has in mind the Apostle or Apostles by whom the Church to which he was writing was evangelized in the first instance. It is extraordinary how little we know of these early missionaries. The names of some have come down to us, and one or two we know well through their writings. Tradition has something to say about a few others, but the greater part of the work of preaching the Gospel and of founding the little communities must have been done by obscure persons of whom the world has never heard. The New Testament has nothing to tell us of the foundation of the Churches of Italy (including Rome), Africa, or Asia east of Palestine, and though we have traditions from other sources, yet we are far from being sure that we can rely on them.

Even here the founders of the Church addressed are not named. But it is clear that they were not unworthy followers of Jesus, and that they endured persecution. They have all passed away, but the manner of their departure may serve as an example and as an inspiration. Possibly they had been martyred in some persecution of which we know little or nothing else, but, whether that were so or not, they had died in a fashion which had attested their **faith.** The language suggests that the readers of the Epistle had known these first Apostles personally, and, if the impression be correct, we have further evidence to the very early (though not apostolic) date of the book.

8 Jesus Christ is always the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

This is one of the greatest single sentences in the New Testament. Adequate comment upon it would involve a complete history of the Christian Church, especially of its inner life, and a prospect of the whole of the spiritual future of mankind. It is the knowledge of the Fact therein stated which gives the human soul its certainty, the Church its continuity, and both a solid foundation on which they can be built up. Evolution, development, progress, decay, and new life—all these familiar elements in our experience mean change. 'All things are in a state of flux,' said an ancient

Greek philosopher, and the experience of mankind attests the justice of his opinion. Yet the world of nature and of man does not lie in hopeless confusion, the sport of every chance movement and stray force. That would mean an intolerable pessimism, which would stultify all human effort and stifle all human aspiration. There is an immutable element in human life, and a changeless, fundamental entity, which underlies all true thinking about God. Man's conceptions of it may change, and as one age succeeds another the stress may be varied and the angle of vision moved, but the great reality is changeless, invariable, immovable. That is what makes life possible for a Christian in a passing world—**Jesus Christ is always the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever.**

Such a sentence as this is necessarily isolated, and has no very close connexion either with what precedes or with what follows. Yet it may be taken as having some bearing both on verse 7 and on verses 9 ff. In the former case it will offer a contrast with the **leaders . . . who spoke the word of God to** the Church, but whose **career** has reached its **close.** There is no end to the life and activity of Jesus. On the other hand it is possible to take the words in connexion with what follows. There are many minds, many opinions, many doctrines, but Jesus Himself is always one and the same.

Never let yourselves be carried away with a variety of novel 9
doctrines ; for the right thing is to have one's heart
strengthened by grace, not by the eating of food—that has
never been any use to those who have had recourse to it.
Our altar is one of which the worshippers have no right to 10
eat. For the bodies of the animals whose *blood is taken* 11
into the holy Place **by the high priest** *as a sin-offering, are*
burned outside the camp ; **and so Jesus also suffered** 12
outside the gate, in order to sanctify the people by His own
blood. Let us go to Him *outside the camp*, **then, bearing** 13
His obloquy (for we have no lasting city here below, we 14
seek the City to come). And by Him *let us* **constantly** *offer* 15
praise to God **as our** *sacrifice*, **that is,** *the fruit of lips* **that**

16 **celebrate His Name. Do not forget beneficence and charity, either ; these are the kind of sacrifices that are acceptable to God.**

These verses form a connected passage in which, even if there is no single thought dominating the whole, each sentence does spring out of that which precedes and lead up to that which follows. In so far as there is a central thought round which the rest is gathered, it is to be found in the reference to a sacrificial meal of some kind, which is not further defined or described.

The section opens with a warning against **a variety of novel doctrines.** Like the Latin word from which the English **' variety '** is derived, the Greek term used here had originally a colour-significance, and meant ' variegated,' ' of different colours.' With his mind concentrated on the one unchanging Christ, the writer feels that there is a real peril lest new theories and teaching should be imported into the old, simple, faith, and should produce a ' patchwork.' Once more we have an echo of a controversy whose subject is somewhat indistinct and vague, though, clearly, it seemed to be of considerable importance to the writer.

One feature of the controversy is certain : it was concerned with **the eating of food,** but it is not easy to define further the exact type of **food,** or the doctrines connected with the **eating** of it, which were actually in question. It might possibly involve the Jewish regulations as to clean and unclean articles of diet, already referred to in ix. 10, where the ancient ordinances are held to be superseded as being merely **outward regulations for the body, that only hold till the period of the New Order.** Or the dispute may range round the question as to whether Christians might participate in any heathen festivals or partake of food offered to heathen deities. This was certainly one of the difficult problems of the ancient Church, as it is a problem for the Indian Church of to-day, and it received elaborate treatment from St. Paul.[1] But the general context has special reference to the death of Jesus, in

[1] 1 Cor. viii.

relation to the ritual of the Day of Atonement. The argument against the eating of food is reinforced by the fact that the victims slaughtered on the day were not eaten but *burned outside the camp*, just as Jesus suffered outside the gate. These considerations make it most probable that the controversy in question centred round the Lord's Supper. But, even so, we are left in the dark as to its precise relation to the subject. It might plausibly be argued that the writer disapproved altogether of the celebration of the Supper as a special ritual, and, in this connexion, it is significant that he never mentions it in the whole course of the book. If the account which he knew of the last hours of Jesus resembled that which is preserved for us in St. Mark and St. Paul (as seems not improbable), then he may have taken the words of Jesus at the table as implying that every meal at which Christians met together was to be a reminder of Him. In that case he might have felt it necessary to protest against the establishment of any special ritual or service for the carrying out of the Lord's command. This, it must be confessed, is, on the surface, the most natural interpretation of his position, and the fact that so many of us have found the Communion the occasion of the deepest insight and of the highest inspiration known to us must not be allowed to blind us to the possibility that the writer's experience may have differed from ours. But it is also possible that he felt that it should have been a simple memorial service, and that he found what he considered to be superstitious ideas gathering round it. He may have been faced with people who believed that the very body and blood of Christ, present in the consecrated elements, gave a profoundly real vitality to the heart. Again, there have been, are, and will be, millions of devout Christians whose spiritual life is nurtured on such a doctrine as this, but it does not follow that the writer was at one with them. Indeed, with his strong sense of the contrast between the two worlds, spiritual and physical, he could hardly have admitted that material food could, by itself, produce any real effect upon men's souls. For the right thing is to have one's heart strengthened by grace.

The opinion is reinforced by reference to the ritual of the Day of Atonement, along lines already adumbrated in the earlier discussion.[1] The two worlds, the real and spiritual and the illusory and material, are contrasted with one another. The latter, represented by the Jewish dispensation, had an altar and sacrifices, which served the temporary and imperfect purpose of the removal of sin. Even in these regulations the bodies of the victims slain in the atonement ritual were never eaten, though the animals used in the ordinary sin-offerings did become the food of the priests, and in the case of the peace-offering the worshippers too shared in the common meal. This is an image, a type, a copy, of the eternal truth, manifested in Jesus. Like the Jews, Christians also have an **altar,** where their atonement is made. They, too, have a sacrificial victim, and these coincidences justify the further conclusion that in this case also **the worshippers have no right to eat** the flesh of Him who offered Himself.

Following the analogy of the atonement ceremonial, the writer notes that Jesus, executed as a criminal, **suffered outside the gate.** If men would come into close and abiding contact with Him, they too must leave the earthly city, that is the world and all that it implies, and, **bearing His obloquy,** sharing in the humiliation and the degradation of the Cross, must **seek,** through Him, **the City,** that is **to come.**

> **For, though they take our life,**
> **Goods, honour, children, wife,**
> **Yet is their profit small;**
> **These things shall vanish all;**
> **The City of God remaineth.**

Once and for all has the supreme gift been laid upon the heavenly altar, and repetition is neither needful nor possible. Yet there is a form of *sacrifice* that is still open to man, and that is the offering of *praise*. It was recognized among the Jewish rabbis, especially after the fall of Jerusalem and the cessation of the Temple worship, that other **sacrifices** were **acceptable to God.** One of these was thanksgiving and *praise*,

[1] Cp. ch. ix.

described, in the language of Hosea, as *the fruit of the lips.*[1] Others included **beneficence and charity,** both well-recognized virtues in the later Judaism, accepted as valid offerings to God, though they never attained that semi-sacramental position which they hold in orthodox Islam. But these actions, since they spring from the heart of man, are proper to those who have linked themselves to the world of spirit and have forsaken that of matter, and so they become the fit and proper offerings for Christians to present.

Obey your leaders, submit to them ; for they are alive to the 17
interests of your souls, as men who will have to account for their trust. Let their work be a joy to them and not a grief—which would be a loss to yourselves.

We now have a reference to the **leaders** of the Church. It is worth noting that there is no mention of special offices ; this Epistle does not help us to elucidate the problems of the organization of the early Church. But, in the nature of the case, there must have been those to whom their fellows looked up as giving them special help and guidance, men who held a **trust** from God. We may conjecture that these **leaders** were known to endorse the views expressed in verses 9–16, and that they realized the dangers of **a variety of novel doctrines.** Against these and other evil influences they were sleeplessly on the watch, being **alive to the interests** of their charges' **souls.** To fail, and to wander into perilous opinions, would be to cause **grief** to these loving, faithful men, and would bring no profit to the members of the Church themselves.

Pray for me, for I am sure I have a clean conscience ; my 18
desire is in every way to lead an honest life. I urge you to 19
this all the more, that I may get back to you the sooner.

[1] Hos. xiv. 2. The traditional Hebrew text has פָּרִים (' bulls ') for פְּרִי (' fruit '), but there is little doubt that the LXX, followed by the writer of Hebrews, had the correct reading.

After the leaders of the Church—or perhaps among them—the writer thinks of himself, and asks his correspondents to pray for him. Such requests were common in the letters of the age, but they gathered a peculiar significance when they passed between Christians. And the additional phrases used may give us a few hints as to the writer's actual position. He writes as though he had been himself one of the leaders of the Church which he is addressing, though he is no longer in its midst. He seems to have ground for suspecting that his ministrations and exhortations will not be wholly acceptable to all the members of the Church ; he may have been faced with some opposition to his work in its midst. But he protests that he has written with no unworthy motive, for he is sure that he has **a clean conscience,** and that his only **desire is in every way to lead an honest life.** The urgency of his appeals is due simply to his sense of the responsibility which is laid upon him, for he, too, **will have to account for** his **trust.** Further, he hopes that he may, at no distant date, pay his readers a personal visit, though he is at present hindered by some obstacle which we cannot determine. It looks at first sight as if he had been imprisoned in some persecution, but he seems sure of being able to pay the visit he desires, and the only uncertain element is the time at which he will be free to come. Few Christians in time of persecution could have been confident of release. And the language of verse 23 is hardly consistent with an imprisonment. As so often in dealing with the external circumstances of this Epistle, we are left completely in the dark.

20 **May the God of peace** *who brought up* **from the dead our Lord**
Jesus, *the* **great** *Shepherd of the sheep, with the blood of the*
21 *eternal covenant,* **furnish you with everything* for the doing of His will, creating in your lives by Jesus Christ what is acceptable in His own sight ! To Him be glory for ever and ever : Amen.**

* Omitting with ℵ, D*, the Latin and Bohairic versions, etc., the homiletic addition of ἐργῷ.

Apparently with the intention of bringing this letter to an end, the writer now breaks out into a great and stately benediction, quoting the familiar metaphor of the **shepherd,** and referring to the doctrine which he has laboured to establish as an interpretation of the death of Christ. He can appeal to the **God of peace,** using the term in the wider sense of general prosperity, to do for his friends what they most need. To illustrate the illimitable power of God, he refers to the resurrection of Jesus—the only place in the Epistle where he does so. If God could bring up **from the dead our Lord Jesus,** then we may be sure that there is nothing that is beyond His power and resources; He can **furnish** men **with every** good **thing for the doing of His will.** No wonder that the benediction ends with a doxology—**To him be glory for ever and ever.**

I appeal to you, brothers, to bear with this appeal of mine. 22
It is but a short letter.

There is still a postscript or two. First an appeal to be patient over the reading of the Epistle. The writer has been thinking it over, and realizes that, though it can easily be read in an hour, yet it may take serious thought, and may, at some points, prove not altogether acceptable. Therefore we have this **appeal** for a patient hearing.

You must understand that [our] brother Timotheus is now free. 23
If he comes soon, he and I will see you together.

A personal note. The Timothy is probably St. Paul's young friend, and it seems that he had been imprisoned, perhaps in some minor persecution. Though his home was, traditionally, at Ephesus, yet he has, apparently, been incarcerated in Italy, and the interest which the readers may be supposed to take in him is the strongest indication we have of their identity. He, together with the writer, expects to visit the Church at no distant date.

Salute all your leaders and all the saints. The Italians salute 24
you.

It is a little curious that a message should be sent to **all** the **leaders,** and this may indicate that it was not the whole Church, but only a section of it—perhaps a single household—to which this Epistle was sent. **The Italians,** too, are a puzzle. They may be Italians resident abroad, in which case the letter is addressed to an Italian community. The allusion to Timothy, however, is against this, for there is nothing to connect him with a Western Church, and we should probably understand by the phrase ' the Christians of Italy.'

25 And so the Epistle ends with **Grace be with you all. Amen.**

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